A STRUGGLE FOR A FORTUNE

HARRY CASTLEMON

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To
Dorothy Cooke
From
Emma Linnaden
Christmas 1923.

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HARRY CASTLEMON

ILLUSTRATED by W. H. FRY

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A Struggle for a Fortune.

CHAPTER I.

About Money.

IT was in a little log cabin with a dirt floor and a stick chimney which occupied almost the whole of one side of it, situated a few miles from Pond Post Office, a small hamlet located somewhere in the wilds of Missouri, that the opening scene of this story took place. There were four occupants of the cabin, sitting around in various attitudes, and they all seemed to be looking at a fifth person, Jonas Keeler by name, who was standing in the middle of the floor with a whip in his hand and a fierce frown on his face. Something was evidently troubling this man Jonas, and, if we listen to a few scraps of the conversation that passed between him and his wife, perhaps we can ascertain what it was.

"And is there any thing else that you want?" inquired Jonas, in a tone that was fully as fierce as his frown. "It beats the world how many things I have to get when I go to town. It is coffee here, and flour there, until I have to have a memory as long as this whip-stock for fear that I will forget some of them."

"But, father, we have got to live somehow," said his wife, who was seated on a rickety chair. "We can't grow fat on air."

"To be sure you can't, but it seems to me that you might make things last longer. We wasn't in this fix before the war. Then we had a house and something that was fit to eat; but ever since the rebs and the Yanks have got in here and burned us out, things is all mussed up and I don't know which way to turn."

"Why, father, you have money now," said his wife.

"Where did I get money? Not much I ain't. It has been this way ever since that old man Nickerson came here to board. I didn't agree to take him for nothing, and I would not have done it if

you hadn't showed signs of getting up on your ear."

"I know you didn't. He gave you one thousand dollars when he first came here, and you said it would be more than enough to keep him as long as he lived."

"But I did not suppose he was going to last forever, did I? He has chawed that up in tobacco long ago; and every time I go to town I am getting him a plug out of my own pocket."

"Do you mean to say that he has used up a thousand dollars in three years?" asked Mrs. Keeler, in a tone of astonishment.

"Now look at you. You seem to think that amount of money will last forever. He has chawed that up and more, too. He must have had more than a thousand dollars when he came here. The folks down to Manchester used to say he was worth ten thousand dollars. What did you do with all that money, old man?"

This question, addressed in no very amiable tone of voice, was spoken to a person who was seated in a remote corner of the cabin as if he

was anxious to get out of reach of the speaker. He was a very aged man, with white locks that came down upon his shoulders and hands that trembled in spite of all he could do to prevent it, and there was something in his eyes and face which he turned toward Jonas that would have appealed to any heart except the heart of Jonas Keeler. The old man was not in his right mind. He had worked hard and laboriously, his hands showed that, for the little money he possessed—Jonas said it was more than a thousand dollars—but those days were passed now. Something, no one could have told exactly what it was, had operated on his mind until he hardly knew what he was doing. But there was one thing he did know and that was that during the last year his supply of tobacco had been extremely limited. What Jonas did with the thousand dollars that he gave him when he first came to his cabin and took up his abode with him, no one ever knew. Some believed that he had invested it in a mortgage while others thought he had it stowed away so that he could draw on it whenever necessity

required it. At any rate his money went somewhere, and Jonas never got him a thing when he went to town without finding fault about it.

There had been a time when this Mr. Nickerson who lived a short distance from Manchester, was thought to be the richest person in all that county. Every thing he had about him went to show it. His horses were the fattest, his beef cattle brought the most money and his farm was nicely kept up. But the war broke out about this time, and Mrs. Keeler often wondered what had become of old man Nickerson who lived twenty miles away. He had been the husband of her sister, but since her death he had lived alone on his farm. He often said that he would not go into either army, he had no hand in bringing on the war and those who were to blame for it could settle the matter among themselves, and the consequence was he was robbed by both Union and Confederates. Every thing he had in sight was gone except one thousand dollars, which he finally gave into the hands of Jonas Keeler with the

understanding that the amount was to support him while he lived.

"I don't much like the idea of giving up my money," said Mr. Nickerson, after he had taken a long time to think the matter over. "If I keep it with me I can get tobacco and other little things that I need; but now that I have let Jonas have it,—I don't know; I don't know. The first thing I know that thousand dollars will all be gone, and then what will I do? We'll see what sort of a man Jonas is to live up to his word."

Jonas Keeler did not believe in war either, and he tried by every means in his power to keep out of it. He hid in the woods when either army came near him, and of course he lost everything he had. The Confederates stole his horses and cattle, and the Union fellows said if he were not a rebel he ought to be, and burned his house over his head. But Jonas had the thousand dollars to go on and with this he was remarkably content. He kept along until the war closed and then he was ready to set out and make his living over again; but he found that it was a hard thing to

do. It was tiresome work to get up where he was before, he never grew any richer, and Jonas, from being a quiet and peaceable man, became sullen and morose, did not like to hear anybody talk of spending money, even though he knew he must spend some in order to live, and finally got so that his family were afraid of him. There was one thing that he never could get through his head: Mr. Nickerson had never said anything about what had become of the rest of his money, and Jonas finally came to the conclusion that it was concealed somewhere, and he wanted to know where it was.

"You need not talk to me about that sum being all the old man had," said he, when he had held one of his long arguments with his wife. "He had more money than that and I know it. What did he do when Daddy Price took him off into the army? He buried it; that's what he did with it."

"But the rebels must have got it," said Mrs. Keeler. "You know they went all over his house and took everything there was in it."

"But they never got any money," said Jonas. "The old man hangs onto a dollar until the eagle hollers before he will give it up, and if they had found anything he would not fail to say so. He has got that money hidden somewhere, and I wish I knew where it was. He makes me so mad when he denies it, that I have half a mind to take him by the scurf of the neck and throw him out of doors."

"Don't do that, Jonas; don't do that," said Mrs. Keeler in alarm. "The old gentleman is getting feeble, I can see that plainly enough, and the only way you can do is to treat him kindly."

"Good gracious! Ain't that what I have been doing ever since he has been here?" demanded Jonas in a heat. "I tell you that his tobacco money is pretty near gone, and when it is *all* gone he will not get any more. It is high time he was quitting that bad habit."

Mrs. Keeler made no remark when she heard this. The idea that a man ninety years old could cease a habit that he had been accustomed to all his life, was absurd. Jonas himself really de-

lighted in a good smoke. How would he feel if he were deprived of that privilege? Furthermore, his wife did not believe that all Mr. Nickerson's money was gone. She was certain that Jonas could find a good deal of it if he looked around and tried.

This conversation took place some time previous to the beginning of our story. Mr. Nickerson's thousand dollars were nearly gone, at least Jonas said so, and at the time we introduce them to the reader it was all gone, and the old man did not know what he would do next. He had not a bit of that staff of life, as he regarded it, remaining, and now Jonas wanted to know where he had hidden the rest of his money. He had held a long talk with the old man down to the stable but could not get any thing out of him. That was one thing that put him in such bad humor.

"What did you do with all that money, old man?" repeated Jonas, when Mr. Nickerson looked up at him with a sickly smile on his face.

"What money?" inquired the old gentleman, as if he had never heard of the subject before.

"Aw! what money!" said Jonas; and when he got into conversation on this matter he nearly always forgot himself and shouted out the words as if the man he was addressing were a mile away. "I mean the money you had stowed away in your pocket-book where the soldiers could not find it; the money we were talking about down to the barn. Where did you put it?"

"I gave you every cent I had left," was the reply. "If there was any more the rebels have got it. Say, Jonas, are you going to get me a plug of tobacco when you go down town?"

"There it is again. No, I ain't. Your money is all gone, and you will have to do without it from this time on."

Jonas started toward the door as if he were in a hurry to get out, but before he had made many steps he suddenly paused in his walk, gazed steadily at the dirt floor and then turned to Mr. Nickerson again.

"Don't you remember where a dollar or two of that money went?" said he; and he tried to make his voice as pleading as he knew how. "If

you could remember that, I might find you a plug or two of tobacco while I am down town."

"There was no more of it in the purse other than the money I gave you," said the old man, once more resting his forehead on his hands and his elbows on his knees. "That was all I had left to give you. You saw the inside of the purse as plainly as I did."

"But you must have some other that was not in the purse," said Jonas. "Where did you put that?"

"All I had was there in my pocket and you have got that. I want a plug of tobacco, too."

"Well, you don't get it out of me this trip," shouted Jonas. "If you won't tell where your money is you can go without tobacco."

Jonas went out, climbed into his wagon and drove off while the old man raised his head from his hands, tottered to the door and watched him as he was whirled away down the road. Then he came back and seated himself on the chair again.

"Jonas still sticks to it that I had more

money in that purse than I gave him," whined Mr. Nickerson. "I hid it under the doorstep before Price took me away to the army. He knew that I was not able to do anything toward driving the mules, I was too old; but he took me along just to let me see that the Confederates ruled this State instead of the Union people. He set me to getting the mules out of the mud holes they got into, but in a few days he saw that I was not of any use at that, so he discharged me where I was all of one hundred miles from home, and left me to get there the best I could. I made it after awhile, although I suffered severely while I was doing it, found my thousand dollars right where I had left it and came up here and gave it to Jonas, consarn my picture. He said it would be enough to get me all the tobacco and clothes I needed, and now it is all gone. What I am going to do beats me."

"I have not got a cent, Mr. Nickerson," said Mrs. Keeler. "If I had I would give it to you in a minute. I have not seen the color of any body's money since the war."

"I know you haven't, Mandy," said Mr. Nickerson. "I have not any kith nor kin of my own, but you have always been good to me, and some day—"

The old man started as if he had been shot, looked all around him, his gaze resting on the faces of the two boys who stood near the door listening to what he had to say, and then hid his face in his hands and burst into a loud cough, doubling himself up as if he were almost strangled. Perhaps the boys were taken by surprise—and perhaps they were not; but Jonas's wife was really alarmed.

"Why, Mr. Nickerson, what is the matter?" she inquired.

"Oh, it is nothing. It will pass off in a few minutes. I get to coughing that way once in a while."

"Especially when you are going to say something you don't want to," murmured one of the boys under his breath. "And some day you are going to pay mother for her goodness to you. I wish I knew what you meant by that."

The boys turned and left the cabin, but they did not go in company with each other. In fact they tried to get as far apart as possible. There was something wrong with them—a person could see that at a glance. What these young fellows had to make them enemies, living there in the wilderness with not another house in sight, shall be told further on.

CHAPTER II.

A Friend In Need.

"NAT, what do you reckon he meant by that?"

"Meant by what?"

"Why he said that mother had always been good to him, and that some day—then he went off coughing and didn't say the rest."

"I don't know, I am sure."

"I reckon he has got some money stowed away somewhere, as pap always said he had, and that when he is gone mother will come into it. By gracious! I wish I could find it."

"Would you take it away from your mother?"

"Yes, sir, I would. I would take it away from any body. I need some clothes, don't I?"

"You would have to go down to Manchester

if you got any money, and that is a long ways from here."

"I don't care; I would find it if I was there. Are you going to get him any tobacco?"

"Me? What have I got to buy him tobacco with? You talk as if I had lots of money hidden away somewhere."

" 'Cause if I see you slipping away any where and I can't find you, I will tell pap of it when he comes home. You know what you will get if I do that?"

"Well, you keep your eyes on me and see if I slip away any where except down to the potato patch," said Nat, indignantly. "That is where I am going now."

The two boys separated and went off in different directions, Nat wending his way to the potato patch and the other going toward the miserable hovel they called a barn to finish his task of shelling corn.

"What a mean fellow that Nat Wood is," said Caleb Keeler, as he turned and gave his departing companion a farewell look. "That boy

has got as much as four or five dollars hidden away about this place somewhere, and I tell you I am going to find it some day. Then won't I have some clothes to wear? I've got a pair of nice shoes which pap made him give me, but I will have more if I find that money. Dog-gone him, he has no business to keep things hidden away from us."

These two boys, Caleb Keeler and Nat Wood, cherished the most undying hatred to one another, and as far as Nat was concerned, there was reason for it. It was all on account of his lost shoes, and they had been taken away from him a year ago. The weather was getting cold, every morning the grass and leaves were wet and it was as much as a bare-footed boy wanted to do to run around in them, and Nat had prepared for it by going down to the store one evening and purchasing a pair of brogans and two pairs of stockings. He fully expected to get into trouble on account of them, and sure enough he did. The next morning he came out with them on, and his appearance was enough to create astonishment on Caleb's

part who stood and looked at him with mouth and eyes wide open.

"Well, if you haven't got a pair of shoes I never want to see daylight again," said Caleb, as soon as he had recovered from his amazement. "Where did you get them?"

"I bought them," said Nat.

"Where did you buy them?"

"Down to the store."

"Where did you get your money?"

"I earned it."

"You did, eh? Well, you ain't been a doing any thing about here to earn any money," declared Caleb, after he had fairly taken in the situation. "If you have money to buy a pair of shoes you can get a pair for me too. How much did they cost you?"

"Two dollars."

"Have you got any more of them bills?"

"Not another bill," said Nat; and to prove it he turned his pockets inside out. There was nothing in them except a worn jack-knife with all

the blades broken which nobody would steal if he had the chance.

"I don't care for what you have in your pockets," exclaimed Caleb, who grew angry in a moment. "You have got more hidden around in the bushes somewhere. You want to get two dollars between this time and the time we get through breakfast, now I tell you. I will go down to the store with you."

"Well, I won't do it," said Nat.

"If you don't do it I will tell pap."

"You can run and tell him as soon as you please. If you want shoes, go to work and earn the money."

Caleb waited to hear no more. He dropped the milk bucket as if it were a coal of fire and walked as straight toward the house as he could go. He slammed the door behind him but in two minutes he reappeared, accompanied by his father. Things began to look dark for Nat.

"There, sir, I have lost my shoes," said he. "If Uncle Jonas takes these away from me he will be the meanest man I ever saw. They are

mine and I don't see why I can not be allowed to keep them."

When Jonas came up he did not appear so cross as he usually did. In fact he tried to smile, but Nat knew there was something back of it.

"Hallo, where did you get them shoes, Natty?" was the way in which he began the conversation.

"I got them down to the store," was the reply, "and Caleb wants me to buy him a pair; but I have not got the money to do it."

"Don't you reckon you could find two extry dollars somewhere?" said Jonas.

"No, nor one dollar. I will tell you what I will do," said Nat, seeing that the smile of his uncle's face speedily gave way to his usual fierce frown. "I will tell you right where my money is hidden and then Caleb can go and find it."

"Well, that's business," said Caleb, smiling all over.

"If you will do that then me and you won't have any trouble about them shoes," chimed in Jonas, once more calling the smile to his face.

"Where have you got it? How many years have you been here, Natty?" continued Jonas, for just then an idea occurred to him. "You have been here just eleven years—you are fourteen now—and you have kept that money hidden out there in the brush all this while. Now why did you do that?"

It was right on the point of Nat's tongue to tell Jonas that he did not have the money when he came there, but he knew that by so doing he would bring some body else into trouble; so he said nothing.

"I was older than you and knew more, and you ought to have given me the money to keep for you," continued Jonas. "If you had done that you could have come to me any time that you wanted a pair of shoes, and you could have got them without the least trouble."

"Won't you take what there is left in my bag after you see it?" asked Nat, hopefully.

"That depends. I want first to see how much you have in that bag. Where is it?"

"Caleb, you know where that old fallen log

is beside the branch near the place where we get water?'' said Nat. ''Well, go on the off side of that and you will see leaves pushed against the log. Brush aside the leaves and there you will find the bag.''

Caleb at once posted off and Jonas, after looking in vain for a seat, turned the milk bucket upside down, perched himself upon it and resumed his mild lecture to Nat over keeping his money hidden from him for so many years. He was the oldest and knew more about money than Nat did, he was a little fellow when he came there —when Jonas reached this point in his lecture he stopped and looked steadily at the floor. Nat was only three years old when he came to take up his abode under the roof of Jonas Keeler, to be abused worse than any dog that ever lived, both by Jonas and his son Caleb, and how could he at that tender age hide away his money so that Jonas could not find it?

''Wh-o-o-p!'' yelled Jonas, speaking out before he knew what he was doing.

''What is the matter?'' inquired Nat.

"Nothing much," replied Jonas. "I was just a-thinking; that's all. If Nat was only three years old when he came here to live with me," he added to himself, "he couldn't have had that money. Somebody has given it to him since, and it was not so very long ago, either. Whoop!" and it was all he could do to keep from uttering the words out loud. "He has got it from the old man; there's where he got it from. And didn't I say that the old man had something hidden out all these years? He didn't give me a quarter of what he saved from the rebels. Now he has got to give me that money or there's going to be a fracas in this house. I won't keep him no longer. You can bet on that."

At this point in his meditations Jonas was interrupted by the return of his son who was coming along as though he had nothing to live for, swinging his hand with the bag in it to let his father believe that there was nothing in it that he cared to save.

"What's the matter?" inquired Jonas.

"I have found the bag but there is nothing

in it, dog-gone the luck," sputtered Caleb. "There is just a 'shinplaster' in it and it calls for two bits. Where is the rest of your money?" he added, turning fiercely upon Nat.

"That is all I have," replied Nat. "It was in that bag, wasn't it? Then I have no more to give you."

Jonas took the bag, glanced at the shinplaster and put it into his pocket. The smile had now given away to the frown.

"Say, pap, ain't you going to give that to me?" asked Caleb, who began to see that the interest he had taken in unearthing Nat's money was not going to help very much.

"No; you can't get no shoes with that money. I will take it and get some coffee with it the next time I go to town. Is this all the money you have left, Nat?"

"Every cent; and now you are going to take that away from me, too?"

"Of course; for I think it is the properest thing to do. You don't ever go to church—"

"And what is the reason I don't? It is be-

cause I have not got any clothes to wear," said Nat, who plainly saw what was coming next.

"That's neither here nor there," said Jonas. "Caleb goes to church, and he would go every Sunday if he had the proper things."

"You bet I would," said Caleb.

"So I think that if you don't go to church and Caleb does, you had better take off them shoes. Take them off and give them to Caleb."

"Now, Uncle Jonas, you are not going to make me go bare-footed this cold weather," said Nat, anxiously. "If Caleb wants shoes let him go to work and earn them."

"I can't go to work about here," said Caleb. "There's nobody will hire me to do a thing."

"Because you are too lazy; that's what's the matter with you," said Nat, under his breath.

"Take off them shoes," said Jonas.

Nat hesitated, but it was only for an instant. Jonas was not the man to allow his orders to be disobeyed with impunity, so he arose from his seat on the milk bucket with alacrity, disappeared in a little room where he kept a switch which he

had often used on the boys when they did anything that Jonas considered out of the way, and when he brought it out with him he found Nat on the floor taking off his shoes.

"You have come to time, have you?" said the man with a grin. "So you are going to take them off and give them to Caleb, are you?"

"I am going to take them off because I can't well help myself," said Nat, boldly. "If I was as big as you are I would not take them off."

"None of that sort of talk to me," said Jonas, lifting the switch as if he were about to let it fall upon Nat's shoulders. "You would take them off if you were as big as a mountain."

When he had removed his shoes Caleb picked them up and in company with his father started toward the house. He wanted to put them where they would be safe, and Nat stood there in his bare feet watching him until he closed the door behind him.

We have not referred to the relationship which Nat bore to Jonas Keeler, but no doubt those into whose hands this story falls will be surprised

to hear it. Jonas was his uncle, and, by the way, Mr. Nickerson was no relation to any body under that roof. Nat's father and mother were dead; his father was killed in the rebel army. Jonas found him in Manchester and brought him home "to keep him safe and sound;" at least that was what he said; but those who knew Jonas thought that the reason was because he suspected that Nat was heir to some money which would some day turn up in his favor. He did not see where the money was to come from, but he believed it, and that was enough. The truth of the matter was, Nat did not have a cent. After he had been there for some years Jonas began to think so too, and from that time his treatment of Nat was anything but what it ought to be. It was only when Mr. Nickerson began to take an interest in him that Nat had anything that he could call his own. He did not like the way Nat was abused—he was in his right mind then and hale and hearty in spite of his years—and took pity on him and determined to help him. That was where Nat's

money came from, and the way he happened to get it was this:

One day, when Jonas went to town, Mr. Nickerson watched his opportunity and followed him out to the field where he was at work alone. Nat greeted him very cordially for he was always glad to see him. Mr. Nickerson was the only one except Mrs. Keeler, who had a kind word to say to him, and Nat remembered him for it.

"Do you know what I would do if Jonas abused me as badly as he does you?" said he.

"No, sir, I don't," replied Nat.

"I would sit down and rest. He has gone away to town now, and when he comes home he can't tell whether you have been at work or not."

The boy leaned on his plow handles—he was eight years old and ought not to have been required to do that sort of work—and looked at Mr. Nickerson without speaking. He wanted to see if the man was in earnest.

"Jonas knows just how much I ought to have done, and when he comes home and finds that I

have not got it all done, he will use that switch on me."

Mr. Nickerson saw that there was some sense in this reasoning, and after kicking some clods out of his way and looking toward the house to make sure that there was no one watching him, he went on to say—

"Jonas uses you pretty rough, does he not?"

"Well, I will be a man some day, and then I will take it out of him, I bet you," said Nat; and when he uttered the words he clenched his hands and his eyes flashed as if there were plenty of spirit in him.

"But that is going to be a long time for you to wait. If you had money do you think you could hide it where Jonas and Caleb could not find it?"

"But I haven't got any," said Nat.

"But I say supposing you had some; could you keep it out of their reach?" said Mr. Nickerson, when he saw Nat's eyes brighten when he thought of all the fine things that money would

buy for him. "If you don't keep it out of their way you will get me into trouble."

"Were you going to give me some money?" stammered Nat.

"I had thought some of it," said the man, lowering his voice almost to a whisper and glancing again toward the house. "I have some money but I dare not keep it. Last night while I was awake, I saw Jonas come in very quietly and go through my trousers' pocket; but he did not find any money there. If he had looked under the head of my bed close to the wall, he would have found two hundred dollars."

While Mr. Nickerson spoke he had drawn a well-filled book from his pocket, opened it and showed to the astonished boy a whole lot of greenbacks which he had stowed away there.

CHAPTER III.

"Mental Reservation."

NAT had never seen so much money before in his life. He thought if he were worth that much that he would drop the plow handles then and there and take to the woods.

"Where did you get so much?" he stammered at length.

"I worked for it, and that's the way Jonas will have to get every cent he makes," said Mr. Nickerson. "What would you do if you had all this money?"

"I would go down to the store and buy some new over-alls," replied Nat, pushing out one leg so that Mr. Nickerson could see the gaping rent in his knee. "They haven't been mended since I put them on."

"Yes; and then when Jonas comes home he would see the new over-alls and would want to

know where you got them. That plan would not work at all, for the first thing you know you would get me into trouble as well as yourself. Now I am going to give you half of this, because I think you are too smart a boy to let it fall into the hands of any body else."

"But what shall I do with it? If you think Jonas will notice my new clothes when he comes home, I can't buy any."

"I don't give it to you to buy good clothes with. In fact you had better let them alone. But when I was of your age I liked to have something to eat when I went to town of a Saturday afternoon—some candy and nuts and such like things."

"Were you ever a boy?" said Nat, in surprise. The idea that that old, gray-headed man could remember so long ago as that fairly took his breath away.

"Oh, yes; I can remember when I was a boy, and it don't seem so very far off, either. I was a young boy, bare-footed as yourself, but I always had money. My father let me have it all, and I

never thought of running away from him to get a chance to spend it. You don't get much candy, I suppose?"

"No, I don't. I hardly know what it tastes like."

"Well, you go down town and ask the grocery man to change one of these bills for you. You see they are all fives, and if you don't spend more than ten cents at a time and keep the rest hidden away, it will be long before any body finds out that you have got any money."

As Mr. Nickerson spoke he glanced toward the house again, looked all around to make sure that there was nobody in sight, and placed a handful of bills in Nat's grasp, reaching down by the side of him so that no one could see him do it.

"Oh, Mr. Nickerson, you don't know how much I thank you for—"

"Yes, I understand all about that. But there is something else that I want to talk to you about. I want you to get me some tobacco with that money."

"I'll do it, and Jonas and Caleb won't know a thing about it. I will hide it where they will never think of looking for it."

"That is what I wanted," said Mr. Nickerson, with a pleased smile on his face. "But you must be very careful. Don't take but one bill at a time, and then if anybody should see you and take it away from you, they won't get all the money."

Mr. Nickerson turned abruptly away from him and walked toward the house, and Nat, feeling as he had never felt before, seized the plow handles and went on with his work. He glanced up and down the field and toward the house to satisfy himself that Caleb was not in sight, and when he went by a little clump of bushes that grew at the lower end of the lot, he dropped the plow, took the reins off his neck and ran toward a fence corner and took his bills from his pocket.

"I guess this place will do until I can find a better one," he muttered, as he scraped away the leaves and placed his treasure within it. "By gracious! It is always darkest just before

day-light. And how do you suppose that Mr. Nickerson knew that I was planning to run away from Jonas? Now I tell you that he had better keep a civil tongue in his head or the first thing he knows when he calls me in the morning, and comes to my bed to use that switch on me because I don't get up, I won't be there. But then I can't go as long as Mr. Nickerson lasts. He will want me to get some tobacco for him."

Nat laid ninety-five dollars in the hole which he had dug for it, placed a chunk over it so that the leaves would not blow off and with a five-dollar bill safe in his pocket he returned to his work. He wanted to yell, he felt so happy; but when he raised his eyes as he turned his horse about, he saw Caleb standing in the upper end of the clump of bushes, regarding him intently. How long had Caleb been there and what had he seen? There was one thing about it: If he knew the secret of that money he would have the hardest fight of his life before he placed his hands upon it.

"What's the matter with you?" said Caleb,

who did not fail to notice the look that came upon Nat's face.

"There is nothing the matter with me," said Nat. "I don't see why I should do all the work and you sitting around and doing nothing."

"What was old man Nickerson doing out here so long with you?" asked Caleb, who did not think it worth while to go into an argument about the work that Nat had spoken of. "He was here with you for half an hour, and you had all this piece of ground to be plowed up before pap came home. And you stayed here and listened to him, too."

"Where were you?" asked Nat.

"I was around in the barn where I could see everything you did," replied Caleb, with a knowing shake of his head.

"What did you see him do?"

"I saw him talking to you; that's what I saw him do. You wasted fully half an hour with him."

Nat drew a long breath of relief and felt considerably more at ease when he heard this, for

if that was all that Caleb had seen, the secret of his money was safe. He had not seen Mr. Nickerson when he passed his hand down by his side and placed the bills safe in Nat's hands.

"What was he talking to you about?" demanded Caleb.

"About certain things that happened when he was a boy," returned Nat. "If you wanted to hear what he said you ought to have come out and listened. But I must go on or I will not get this piece plowed by the time your father comes back. Get up here, you ugly man's horse."

"Now you just wait and see if I don't tell pap of that," said Caleb, who grew angry in a moment. "I learn you to call pap's horse ugly."

"I didn't say he was ugly. I said he belonged to an ugly man; and if your father did not look mad when he went to town, just because Mr. Nickerson wanted some tobacco, I don't want a cent."

The horse, after being persuaded by the lines, reluctantly resumed his work and Caleb was left there standing alone. There was some-

thing about Nat that did not look right to him. He always was independent, and acted as though he did not care whether Caleb spoke to him or not, but just now he seemed to be more so than ever.

"I wish I knew what was up between that boy Nat and old man Nickerson," said he, as he started out toward the barn. "Every move that old man makes I think he has got some money hidden somewhere about here. Pap thinks so and so do I. I just keep a watch of Nat more closely than I have heretofore, and if I can find his money—whoop-pe!"

Jonas did not find any fault when he came home that night, for Nat, by keeping the horses almost in a trot, had got the field plowed, the team unharnessed and fed before he returned. He found fault with him and brought his switch into play more than once on other matters, but during the five years that elapsed he never said "money" to him once. During these five years he always kept his money concealed, and every time he went to town he always bought a goodly

store of tobacco for the old man. And nobody ever suspected him or Mr. Nickerson, either. Of course, during this time, Jonas became more sullen and ugly than ever, and worse than all, Nat could see that there was something having an affect upon his old friend, Mr. Nickerson. Either it was his age or the treatment he received that had a gloomy impression upon him, but at any rate Mr. Nickerson was losing his mind. He no longer talked with Nat the way he used to, but was continually finding fault with his money and where it went to so suddenly that he could not get any more tobacco to chew to help him while away the hours. Jonas encouraged him to talk this way for somehow he got it into his head that Mr. Nickerson would some day forget himself, and that he would tell where he had hidden his money; but not a thing did he get out of him. The old gentleman was apparently as innocent of any thing he had concealed as though he had never heard any thing about it.

"You may as well give that up," said his wife, after Jonas had tried for a long time to

induce him to say something. "If he had any money when the war broke out, the rebels have got it."

"Not much I won't give it up," declared Jonas, turning fiercely upon Mrs. Keeler. "If this old place could talk it would tell a heap. I have hunted it over and over time and again, but I can't find any thing. I tell you I am going to get rid of him some day. I will send him to the poor house; and there's where he ought to be."

When Nat heard Jonas talk in this way it always made him uneasy. As soon as it came dark he would go to the place where he had hidden his tobacco and money and take them out and conceal them somewhere else, carefully noting the spot and telling the old man about it.

At the end of five years his money was all gone, and then Nat was in a fever of suspense because he did not know where he was going to get some more tobacco for Mr. Nickerson and candy for himself; and when he was asked for

more he was obliged to say that his tobacco money had all been exhausted.

"Well, I expected it," said Mr. Nickerson. "But it has lasted you a good while, has it not? There's some difference between you and Jonas. I gave him all of a thousand dollars when I came here—"

Nat fairly gasped for breath. He wondered what Jonas could have done with all that money.

"It is a fact," said the old man. "He told me that it would keep me in spending money as long as I lived, and now it has been gone for several years. You had a hundred dollars, and it has lasted until now. You go out to the barn and in about half an hour I will be out there."

Like one in a dream Nat made his way to the tumble-down building that afforded the cattle a place of refuge in stormy weather, and looked around for something to do while he awaited Mr. Nickerson's return. If we were to say that he was surprised we would not have expressed it. Was the old man made of money? It certainly looked that way, for when a hundred

dollars was gone he simply said "he had expected it" and went out to find more. In a few minutes he returned and placed another package of bills in Nat's pocket.

"Do you know you told a lie to Jonas every time he asked you about this money?" said Nat.

"No, I did not," said Mr. Nickerson, earnestly. "I told him that I did not have any more money for him; and I didn't have, either. I have not got a cent about me."

Nat was not old enough to remember the form of oath administered by the United States government to all its employees—"do you solemnly promise without any mental reservation"—for if he had been he would have seen how Mr. Nickerson got around it. Jonas did not administer this form of oath, Mr. Nickerson had a "mental reservation" that he had some money hidden but he did not say anything about it. He supposed that he was living up to the truth.

"I did not have a cent," repeated the old man. "He could have searched me all over and not found any. When he asked me if I had

any more concealed somewhere in the bushes, I found some way to avoid it. It is all right. I have not lied to him."

With a hundred extra dollars in his pocket Nat thought he was able to buy himself a pair of shoes when the weather became cold. He bought them and as we have seen they were taken away from him and given to Caleb, because Caleb went to church and Nat did not. He had to wait a long time before Jonas bought him some foot-wearing apparel out of some of Mr. Nickerson's money, and then he invested in them because he was fearful that his neighbors would have something to say about the boy's condition, going about in all that sloppy weather with nothing to wear on his bare feet. This brings us down to the time when our story begins, when Jonas got into his wagon and drove toward town and Nat went to the potato patch to finish picking and digging and Caleb to the barn to complete his task of shelling corn.

We left Mr. Nickerson sitting in company with Jonas's wife, bemoaning his loss of tobacco

and trembling for fear of something he had said in regard to what he would do with his money in case he were done with it.

"I wish I had some money so that I could give you some of it when I am gone," whined the old man. "For I shall not last much longer."

"Oh, yes you will," returned Mrs. Keeler. "You will last many years yet. There is Mr. Bolton who is almost a hundred years old."

"But he gets different treatment from what I do," said Mr. Nickerson. "He has tobacco every day in the week, if he is a mind to ask for it. And he did not give his son one thousand dollars to keep him while he lived."

"Well, I can't help that," said Mrs. Keeler, with a sigh. "Your money is all gone, at least Jonas says so, and I don't see what else you can do."

"I don't either," said the old man; and as he spoke he got upon his feet and staggered toward the door. "Thank goodness I have a little money left," he added to himself. "I must go

and get me some tobacco. I have to be all by myself when Jonas is here, or else he would see me chewing it and would want to know where I got it. I hate to be so sly about everything I do."

Mr. Nickerson left the house without any hat on, he was so wrapped up in his troubles that he forgot that he had a hat, and tottered toward the barn where Caleb was at work shelling corn. Caleb looked up when he heard his footsteps but when he saw who it was he went on with his work, paying no heed to him. The old man went by and just then an idea occurred to Caleb.

"I wonder if old Nickerson is going after some tobacco?" said he, laying down his ear of corn and rising hastily to his feet. "He thinks I am blind and Nat does, too; but I have seen him chewing tobacco plenty of times when he has asked father to get him some and he would not do it. I guess I'll keep an eye on him."

That was easy enough to do, for Mr. Nickerson did not pay much attention to what was going on near him. He stepped hastily out of the barn and followed along after him until he saw him

enter the little clump of bushes at the lower end of the potato patch. He did not dare go any farther for fear the rustling of the bushes would attract the old man's attention, but kept on around the clump until he reached a place where he could see the whole of the field without being seen himself. Mr. Nickerson presently appeared, kept on to a certain fence corner in which he was lost to view.

"Dog-gone my buttons! He has got some money there," whispered Caleb, so excited that he could scarcely stand still. "If he hasn't got money he has some tobacco, and I will just take it when he goes."

While he was wondering how he was going to work to find out what Mr. Nickerson had found there, he cast his eyes toward the upper end of the field and saw that Nat had ceased his work, was standing with his hands resting on his hips and closely watching Mr. Nickerson. He made no attempt to stop him, and according to Caleb's way of looking at it, that was all the evidence he

wanted to prove that Nat was in some way interested in what was hidden there.

"Now what is to be done?" said Caleb to himself. "Nat must know what is concealed there. I declare I have two fellows to fight now."

CHAPTER IV.

A Keepsake.

CALEB stood and thought about it. He could not go to the fence corner where the old man was while Nat was in plain sight, and he must think up some way of getting him away from there. It is true that he might have waited until darkness came to conceal his movements, but Caleb was a boy who did not believe in doing business that way. He wanted to find out what was in that fence corner, and he must find it out now. He could not afford to wait until night came.

"You must come away from there, Mister Nat," said he, as he crouched down behind the bushes and made his way toward the house. "You must come away in five minutes, for I am not going to run any risk of your slipping up and

hiding that thing, whatever it is, that the old man has found."

In a few minutes he reached the house and went directly to the water-pail in order to quench his thirst; but there was no water there.

"Mother, send Nat down to the branch after some water," said he.

"Suppose you go yourself," was the reply. "Nat is busy digging potatoes."

"I can't go. I am busy getting that corn ready for pap to take to mill tomorrow. I am so thirsty I can't speak the truth. Nat can go as well as not."

"Bessie, go out and call Nat to get some water," said Mrs. Keeler. "I suppose he will have to go."

Bessie went, and as soon as she was clear of the house Caleb bent his steps toward the barn and from the barn to the bushes, where he arrived just in time to see Mr. Nickerson come out of the fence corner, biting a plug of tobacco as he came.

"That's all the tobacco you will get out of

that pile," chuckled Caleb, as he rubbed his hands together. "I will take it all and give it to pap."

Presently Bessie was heard calling Nat. The latter threw his hoe spitefully down and went to obey the order, and as soon as he was out of sight Caleb arose from the bushes and ran for the fence corner. He had taken particular pains to mark the corner, and in fact there was little need of it, for the old man's marks were plainly visible there. He found the leaves raked to one side, a little hollow exposed but there was nothing in it. Caleb threw himself on his knees and made the cavity larger, but there was not a thing that rewarded his search.

"There was just one plug of tobacco left and he got it," said Caleb, who was very much disappointed. "And there's no money in it either. Now had I better tell pap or not? There is a heap of skirmishing going on here, the first thing you know, and if I keep watch perhaps I can find some money. I guess I'll think about that for a while."

Being anxious to reach the cover of the bushes before Nat should return, Caleb did not stop long in the fence corner, but made all haste to get out of sight And he was none too soon. The bushes had hardly closed up behind him before Nat came into view.

When darkness came the boys began to do their chores and Jonas returned from town. One could always tell Jonas when he was half a mile away because he shouted at his horses as though they were hard of hearing. Mr. Nickerson heard him coming and went down to the barn to meet him.

"Did you get any tobacco for me, Jonas?" said he, in a whining voice which had of late years become habitual with him.

"No, I did not," roared Jonas. "You won't tell me where your money is, and you can go without tobacco. I wish there was something else you liked as well as you do that weed, and I would shut down on that too."

"I shall not be with you long," began Mr. Nickerson. "I feel that I am going—"

"Aw! Get along with that," interrupted Jonas, who hung one of his harnesses on its peg and then turned savagely upon the speaker. "You have always got something the matter with you when you don't get any tobacco."

"I have a keepsake for you up at the house," continued the old man. "If you will come up there when you get through I will give it to you."

Jonas began to prick up his ears at this. He wished now that he had brought the old gentleman some tobacco; but as he had not done it, he made all haste to smooth matters over as well as he could.

"I didn't mean anything, Mr. Nickerson," said he, coming forward to shake him by the hand. "But I met with a heap of bother while I was down town to-day, and I absolutely forgot all about your tobacco. Never mind; I will send Nat down after it."

"Thank you. Thank you," said the old man. "It will be a heap of comfort to me. You don't know how long the time seems without it."

"Yes, I know. I like a smoke pretty well,

and I would not give it up to please anybody. Now you run along to the house and in a few minutes I will be there. A keepsake," he muttered to himself. "It is money, I know. I believe I took the right course when I shut down on that man's weed."

It was astonishing what that word "keepsake" made in Jonas's feelings. He had but two expressions which came to his face—the smile and the frown. No one to have seen him as he finished putting out his team, would have thought that a frown ever came on his countenance. He was all smiles, and once or twice he forgot himself so as to try to strike up a whistle. This attracted the attention of Caleb who was amazed at it.

"What's the matter with you, pap?" said he.

"There is nothing the matter with me," replied Jonas, cheerfully. "When a man does right he always feels happy. That's the kind of opinion you want to grow up with. If you make everybody around you jovial, of course you are jovial yourself."

"Are you happy because you didn't get the old man what he wanted?" continued Caleb, who would have given everything he had to know what had brought about that wonderful change in his father's appearance. Caleb knew that he could bring the frown back to his face in short order. He had but to mention that the old man had a plug of tobacco in his pocket, and that he had seen him dig it out of the fence corner; but something told him that he had better keep quiet. He was going to keep close watch of Nat and Mr. Nickerson now—he did not know how he was going to do it, for he kept close watch of them already—and perhaps they would lead him to the place where they had concealed some money.

"Yes, sir, that is a point that I want you to remember all your life," Jonas went on. "I forgot all about Mr. Nickerson's tobacco, and that was the reason I didn't bring it. But I will make up for it after supper. Have you milked, Caleb? Then pick up your pail and let's go up to the house. A keepsake," Jonas kept saying to himself, as he walked along. "He knows that I want

money worse than anything else, and that was what he meant. The idea that he should keep money in that house so long, and I was looking everywhere for it!"

Jonas was in a hurry, anybody could have seen that, and he kept Caleb in a trot to keep pace with him. When he opened the door he greeted his wife with a cheerful "hello!" and picked up his youngest child and kissed him. Mrs. Keeler was as much amazed at his actions as Caleb was. She stood in the middle of the floor with her arms down by her side and her mouth open, seemingly at a loss to comprehend his movements.

"Now, then, where is Mr. Nickerson?" said Jonas, pulling an empty chair toward him.

"Mr. Nickerson," said Caleb to himself. "There is something in the wind there. He never called him Mr. Nickerson before unless he had something to make out of him. He was always 'that old man' or 'that inspired idiot' when he wanted him to do errands for him. What's up, I wonder?"

"I forgot all about his tobacco," said Jonas, seating himself and repeating what he had said to Caleb. "I had a heap of trouble down town, but I will send Nat down after it as soon as we get a bite to eat. Ah, Mr. Nickerson, you are on hand, I see. What's this?"

The old man had in his hand the "keepsake" which he intended to give to Jonas. It was a book bound in cloth. It had been well-read evidently, for some of the leaves were loose and one cover was nearly off. But the leaves were all there, and there was *something* in it that Jonas did not know anything about; if he had known it he would have received it very differently.

"What is that?" asked Jonas.

"It is the keepsake I promised you," said Mr. Nickerson. "Take it, read every word of it and you will find something in it before you get through that will make you open your eyes and bless your lucky stars that you have been so good to me."

Jonas took the book and ran his thumb over the leaves. He turned the back of the book to-

ward him and read the name "Baxter's Saints' Rest" on it in gilt type. The expression of intense disgust that came upon his face when he looked at the book set Caleb to snickering, and even Nat, who was leaning against the door post a little distance away, smiled in spite of himself.

"And is this the only keepsake you have got to give me?" shouted Jonas.

"It is the only one," said Mr. Nickerson. "Read it carefully, every word of it, and you will thank me for giving it to you."

"Where's the money?" exclaimed Jonas, who could not get that thing out of his mind.

"You have got all the money I have to give you. I gave you a thousand dollars—"

Jonas became furious all on a sudden. With a muttered exclamation under his breath, he drew back the book with the intention of throwing at the old man's head; but he stayed his hand in time. Then he turned it upon Caleb; but the boy had rushed out of the door and was safe. But Nat stood there, he had not moved at all, and instantly the book left Jonas's hand and flew with

terrific force at the boy's head. It struck the door post and bounded out of doors, and Nat slowly straightened up and went after it. It was a work of some difficulty to pick it up, for the leaves were scattered in every direction, but Nat got it done at last and went away with it.

"Jonas, Jonas, you will be sorry for that," said Mr. Nickerson, who covered his face with his hands.

"Get out of here! Get out, you inspired idiot!" roared Jonas, striding up and down the cabin as if he were demented. "Don't you dare come into this house again."

"Oh, father!" exclaimed Mrs. Keeler.

"Shut up your yawp, old woman," said Jonas, turning upon her. "That was the keepsake he had to give to me, was it? I thought it was money, dog-gone it, and here he comes and presents me with a *book!* He shan't stay in my house no longer."

Mr. Nickerson went out and tottered to the barn, and when Nat found him there a few minutes later he was doubled up with his elbows on

his knees, but his jaws were working vigorously. If there was nothing else which could comfort him, he found it in his tobacco.

"Here's your book, Mr. Nickerson," said Nat, who, if he had been big enough, would have resented the way the old man had been treated. "Shall I take it back and put it among your things?"

"No; never mind that now. Jonas has told me that I can not go into his house again, and he may rest assured that I will never do it."

"He did not mean what he said," exclaimed Nat. "He is all over his passion by this time."

"It is too late. He will never see a cent of my money. Did you put those leaves all in just as you found them?"

"I tried, but I reckon I did not succeed very well."

"Did you find anything that did not belong there?"

"I found two leaves that were pasted together," said Nat, and he grew excited at once when he saw the expression that came upon Mr.

Nickerson's face. "Did you know about those two leaves?"

"Have you brought them with you?"

"I have. I would have left the whole book behind before I would them, for I knew they meant something," said Nat, producing them from his pocket the leaves of which he had spoken. "Now, by holding it up to the light this way," he added, "in order to see what was in them, I can see through the leaves, and I can see a third piece of paper in there."

"Yes; and there is something on that paper, too," said the old man rising to his feet and going toward the door. "We must first make sure that there is nobody coming; for you have a fortune right there in your hands."

"A fortune?" gasped Nat.

"It was the money I had in the bank at the time the war broke out," said Mr. Nickerson, who, having looked up and down the place and toward the house to satisfy himself that he and Nat were safe from intrusion, returned to his seat. "It is all in gold, too."

"How-how much is there of it?" said Nat, who did not know whether to believe the story or not.

"As much as three or four thousand dollars; perhaps more; I did not count it. You see, I drew this money at different times, and as fast as I got it, I hid it. When the rebels came there and took me away, they searched the house high and low for some money that they supposed I had, but it was not in the house; It was out in the field. You see this black line?" he continued, taking the two leaves and pointing with his shivering finger to one of the marks on the inclosed paper. "By the way, you don't want to take this out until you are already to go to work, for fear that somebody may steal it from you. Well, you go to the house—"

"But how can I tell where it is?" cried Nat. "Those men cleaned you out. They thought they would get something by doing that."

"They didn't, so they might as well have left me my house. However, it don't matter much now. I shall never live in it again. You

can tell where the house stood, even if it is not there now, can't you? You go to the corner of that house nearest the woods, hold this paper before you and follow as straight a course as you can down the hill and across the break until you come to a brier patch. It is made up entirely of briers, for I cut them down and put them there. Then leave that to your right and go thirty yards and you will strike a stone, as big as you can lift, which does not look as though it had ever been touched. But it has been, and you can pry it up if you want to. When you get that stone out of its place, you dig down about two feet, and there you will find it."

Nat listened with all his ears, but there was one thing that did not look right about it: The old man talked about the place and the way to find it as though there had never been anything the matter with him at all. If there was something wrong about his mind, Nat failed to see what it was. He talked as though he were reading from a book.

"But what makes you give all this to me?"

said Nat at length. "You don't act as though you had any interest in it at all."

"I am not going to last long, and I know it," said Mr. Nickerson. "I have neither kith nor kin in this land, or in any other so far as I know, and since Jonas does not want the money, why you can have it. I know enough about law to know that there is nobody can take it away from you. If you could, I say if you could without too much trouble, call and see Jonas's wife after you get the money, and give her one thousand dollars, I could rest easy. Could you do that much for me?"

"Of course I can. I will give it all to her if you say so."

"No, I don't want you to do that. I know you would give it all to her, because you are an honest boy. You have been good to me during the years I have been here, never had anything cross to say to me, you don't like Jonas, and neither do I. Mandy has been good to me, too, but you see if I give her this money Jonas

will have a chance to take it. I don't want him to see a cent of it."

"But Mr. Nickerson, what was your object in pasting your description in the book this way? The book might have been stolen."

"But it was not stolen. As many as fifty soldiers, Union and Confederate, have had that book in their hands, and when they came to turn it up and see what the title was, they threw it aside. No soldier wants to read a book like that. It is growing late and I must lie down somewhere."

"Come into my room and turn into my bunk," said Nat. "You will sleep well there."

"Jonas has turned me out of his house and I am going to stay out," said Mr. Nickerson, with more spirit than he usually exhibited. "I will lie down here and die in his barn."

"Don't talk that way, Mr. Nickerson," said Nat; and some way or other he could not get it out of his head that the old man was in earnest. "If you are going to stay here I will go up and

get a couple of blankets and a pillow for you. I will see you all right in the morning."

He laid the book beside the old man, folded up the two leaves and put them into his pocket and hurried toward the house. Somehow he did not feel exactly right about Mr. Nickerson.

CHAPTER V.

Jonas Tries to Make Amends.

IT is hard to tell what Jonas Keeler's feelings were as he paced back and forth in his narrow cabin, his eyes flashing, his hands clenched and his lips framing to himself words that he dared not utter aloud. He was disappointed—sorely disappointed because Mr. Nickerson, who knew that he wanted money, that he thought of nothing else, had presumed to present him a book for a keepsake. Sometimes he felt so angry at him that he had half a mind to go out, find the old man and throw him over the bars. His wife said nothing for some minutes, but seeing that Jonas was getting madder instead of better natured, she ventured to put in a word or two.

"Father, you didn't do right in talking to

the old man the way you did," said she, hardly knowing how her words would be received.

"The old fool!" hissed Jonas, throwing his hat into one corner and burying both of his hands in his hair. "What did he want to give me a book for when he knows how badly I need money? I am sorry that I was so good natured with him afterward."

"But father, there was something in the book," continued Mrs. Keeler, a sudden idea occurring to her.

Jonas stopped quickly and faced her, a queer expression on his face.

"There may have been something in the book that told you where his money was. That is if he has got any money; which I don't believe."

Jonas began to see the matter in a different light now. He pulled a chair close to his wife's side and sat down in it.

"Do you think there was money in the book?" he almost whispered.

"No, I don't. You threw the book with

force enough to tear it all to pieces; but there may have been a paper or something else in the leaves which told where his money was hidden. But between you and me, I would not put the least faith in it."

"Why wouldn't you?"

"Because the old gentleman is not in his right mind. You have talked about money, money and nothing but money ever since he has been here, and you have finally got him in the way of believing that he has some."

"Well, I don't know about that. The old fellow talks plainly enough sometimes, and then again he rattles on and you can't make head or tail of what he says. But I wonder if there was anything in that book? If there was anything there, it must have been put in years ago, when the old man was right in his top story."

"It would not do any harm for you to find out. You can tell him that you did not mean anything by what you had said—"

"That depends upon whether I do or not," said Jonas hastily. "I will wait until I see what

is in that book first. If there is a plan in there which tells where to go to find the money, but you say he hasn't got any, why then I will be kinder good natured with him; but if there is nothing there, he can just keep out of my house; and that's all there is about it."

Jonas thought that by this time Mr. Nickerson had gone to bed, so he went out and started toward a little lean-to, it could scarcely have been called any thing better, which was the place where the old man slept. There were leaks in the roof and sundry cracks through which the severe winds could seek entrance, but that was not the kind of sleeping place Jonas had in the cabin. There everything was tight, and there were a few articles of furniture scattered around, such as a table and chairs and a wash stand. In place of a shake-down he had a regular bed-stead and the blankets and quilts on it were abundant to keep him warm in the coldest weather. It was dark in the lean-to, but Jonas knew the way. He groped his way up to the shake-down but there

was nobody in it. In fact the bed had not been slept in at all.

"By George! I reckon the old fool took me at my word," said Jonas, as he turned toward the door. "I did not think the fellow had so much pluck. I wonder where he is?"

He bent his steps this time toward the lean-to which Nat called his room. It was a little better than Mr. Nickerson's and but a very little better. It was tight, but there was no furniture in it; the dirt floor did duty as chairs and wash-stand. Whenever Nat got up in the morning and desired to perform his ablutions, there was the branch handy, and it was but little trouble to go down there. It was dark in here, too, but a slight feeling among the bed clothes showed Jonas that somebody had been there. The pillow was gone, and so were the quilts that Nat usually spread over him.

"This beats my time all hollow," said Jonas, pulling off his hat and wiping his forehead. "If he should go out among the neighbors—but then

he can't have gone that far. Nat is going to make him up a bed somewhere."

Jonas's next trip was to the barn, and there he found Mr. Nickerson stretched out on a rude bed which Nat had made for him, and a lighted lantern throwing a dim light over the scene. Jonas first impulse was to find out what had become of that book. It was there, lying on the pillow close beside Mr. Nickerson's head. Nat was seated on the floor a little ways from him, but he did not say anything when Jonas came in.

"Hello!" said the new-comer, with an attempt to appear cheerful. "What you laying down out here for? Why don't you get up and go to your own room?"

"You have told me once that I need not come into your house any more," said the old man, in his usual whining tone, "and I am going to take you at your word. I shall never go into your house again."

"Shaw!" said Jonas, with a sorry effort at a laugh. "You didn't pay any attention to what I said, do you? If I had brought your to-

bacco you would be all right now; but I was bothered so with a heap of things that happened while I was down town, that I forgot all about it. I didn't mean nothing. Is this the book you were going to give me for a keepsake?"

"Oh, yes, that's the one."

"What does it say in it?" continued Jonas; and Nat could see that he was turning over the leaves very carefully.

"I wanted you to read it all, every word of it, and perhaps it would have done you some good."

"Well, get up and go into the house. The old woman has got some hot tea left for you, and you will sleep better there than you will here. Have you got a programme, or whatever you call it, so that I can find where your money is hidden?"

"No, there is nothing of the kind there," said Mr. Nickerson, with a movement which showed plainly that he wished Jonas would go away. "There is nothing but reading in the book."

Jonas was getting angry again. Nat could see that by the looks of his face.

"Are you sure there is nothing in it?" he asked, in a voice which trembled in spite of himself.

"Not a thing. You can examine it and see for yourself. I shall not last long—"

"I don't want to hear no such talk as that. You will last longer than I will, I bet you. Nat, have you got any of this book stowed away about your good clothes?"

"No, sir, I have not," answered Nat, rising to his feet. "You can search me and see."

Nat was perfectly safe in making this proposition. We said he had put those two leaves into his pocket; so he did; but he had taken pains to conceal them since. In a remote corner of the barn were some corn huskings which Caleb had left there as he was working at the grain to be taken to the mill. Underneath that pile were the two leaves that Jonas wanted to find.

"That's the way you always serve me when you think I have got anything you want," said

Nat boldly. "You took a quarter away from me that I had left after buying my shoes. and I haven't seen it since."

"Of course I did. It was the properest thing that I should have the handling of all your money; but any more such talk as that will bring the switch down on your shoulders in good shape. You hear me? There's nothing but reading in this book, you say old man?"

"That's all, and you would not have it when I offered it to you. I gave you a thousand dollars which you promised—"

"Aw! shut up about that," said Jonas, rising to his feet; for in order to hold conversation with Mr. Nickerson he had kneeled down by his side. "There's nothing in here that tells about the money?"

"No, no, there is nothing of that kind, I have not got any money. I am a poor, feeble old man and shall not last long—"

"I will bet you won't," roared Jonas, livid with rage and shaking his fist in the old man's face. "You won't get a bite of anything to eat

until you tell me where that money is; you hear me?"

"I don't expect it; I never have expected it. I shall die before morning—"

Jonas did not wait to hear any more, nor did he say anything further about Mr. Nickerson getting up and going to his own room. He did stop long enough to throw the book at Nat, but Nat was on the alert and the missive did not touch him. It ruined the book so far as reading was concerned. The remaining leaves were torn out of it and scattered all over the floor, and it was useless for anybody to think of putting them together again.

"Thank goodness, he has gone at last," said Mr. Nickerson, with a long drawn sigh of relief. "I expected he would come here."

"So did I; and I took my leaves and hid them under this pile of corn," said Nat. "Now I wish there was something else that I could do for you."

"There is nothing, nothing. I shall not be here much longer to bother him, but he will think

of me when I am gone. Nat, you must try to get that money. Don't you let anybody see that paper. Hide it carefully so that no one can find it. Good night. I want to sleep now. Come in in the morning and see me."

"I will do it," said Nat, getting upon his feet and shaking the old man cordially by the hand. "I shall not wait until morning, either. You may want something or other during the night."

Nat went away feeling heavy hearted over what had just occurred. Something, he did not know what, told him that the old man would never live to see the sun rise again. He felt guilty in going away from him, but Mr. Nickerson had requested it, and he did not see what else there was to be done.

"I won't take my clothes off at all when I lie down," said Nat, going into his lean-to and shutting the door behind him. "And to think that I am rich and going to be rich through his death! I wish the old man was in perfect health

and was going off with me. I would make his life be as peaceable as I knew how."

Nat's brain was so upset with all that had happened that he could not think very readily, but he did not ponder upon anything so much as he did upon what the old gentleman had said to Jonas: "I shall die before morning." That was bringing the matter pretty close to him, and he resolved that he would not go to sleep at all; but his work with the potatoes had wearied him, and almost before he knew it he was in the land of dreams. He awoke with a start and it was broad day-light. To roll off his shake-down, seize his hat and make his way to the barn was the work of a very few minutes. Everything seemed quiet and still there. With cautious haste he opened the door and saw Mr. Nickerson lying on his shake-down just as he left him the night before. He wanted to say something to him but he did not dare. He drew a step closer and one look was enough. With frantic speed he ran to the house, pushed open the door and seized Jonas by the shoulder.

"Wake up, here," he said, in a trembling voice. "The old man has bothered you for the last time. He is dead."

Jonas was a sound sleeper and it was a hard task to awaken him; but there was something so thrilling in Nat's words that he was on his feet in an instant. He looked at the boy as though he did not know what he meant.

"Mr. Nickerson lies dead down in your barn," said Nat, earnestly. "He told you last night that he would die before morning, and sure enough he has."

"Why-I-You don't mean it!" exclaimed Jonas, his eyes wide with excitement.

"Don't stop to talk, Jonas," said Mrs. Keeler nervously. "Did you see him, Nat?"

"I have just come from there."

"Then go along and see if you can do something," urged his wife. "Maybe he ain't dead."

Jonas had by this time hurriedly put his clothes on, and he led the way to the barn with top speed, stopping only to call Caleb on the way. Everything was as Nat had left it the night

before. There was "Baxter's Saints' Rest" with the leaves all torn out of it, lying by the dead man's head, and it seemed as though the old man had not moved a finger since Nat bade him good night.

"Well, sir, he has gone up," said Jonas; and Nat looked to see some little twinge of remorse in his tones. But there was not a particle that he could see, not even an expression of regret.

"Yes, he is gone, and now what remains for us to do? We can't let him lie here," said Nat, as he looked at the withered form of the old man.

"Say, Nat, don't you say any thing about his being out here where the neighbors can hear it," said Jonas, with a scowl, pulling Nat up close to him and whispering the words in his ear. "If you do, remember that switch."

"I am not at all afraid of your whipping me," said Nat, wrenching his arm out of Jonas's grap. "You have done that for the last time. You had better make arrangements to do some-

thing with Mr. Nickerson's body, if you are going to."

Jonas stood and looked at Nat as if he could scarcely believe his ears. The rebellion, which he had been working up for so long, had come suddenly and promptly, too, and the man was afraid of it. What was Nat going to do? There was but one thing that came up in Jonas' mind and that was money. It dawned upon him that Mr. Nickerson had possibly taken the boy into his confidence and Jonas saw that if such were the case he must keep quiet in order to find out what it was.

"I don't mean to harm you, Natty," said he, but his looks certainly belied him, "but you can see for yourself how the neighbors will talk if they find out that the old man had been sleeping in my barn."

"I understand all about that," said Nat. "You need not fear of my saying any thing. You had better shut up Caleb's mouth if you want the thing kept secret."

Jonas evidently thought so too. He took

Caleb off on one side and held a very earnest conversation with him, and after this, with Mrs. Keeler's help, who came down to the barn as soon as she was fairly dressed, they made out to carry the old man's body up to the house and lay it on Jonas's bed. Nobody passed along the road while they were doing it. When the neighbors came there they would think that Mr. Nickerson had died in that room; they would not think of the barn at all. When this much had been done Nat was sent off post haste on a mule for the doctor, and Caleb was commanded to go around to those who lived close by and tell them of the bereavement that had come upon the house of Jonas Keeler during the night. After that Jonas seated himself upon a chair in the cabin, folded his arms, dropped his chin upon his breast and waited for the neighbors to come.

After that each one had his particular duties to perform, though the neighbors did the most of it. Jonas was too weak and dispirited to do any thing, even to doing the chores, and left it all to Caleb, who went about wondering if the old

man's taking off was going to work any change in his circumstances. Nat's first care was to find the two leaves that were pasted together and hide them where there was no possibility of any body's hunting them out. Then he settled down to think about his future. Mr. Nickerson was gone, and what had he to keep him longer under Jonas's roof? He had seventy-five dollars in money, he had kept a strict account of that, and what was there to hinder him from going down to Manchester and making an effort to enrich himself? It required long study, but by the time the funeral was over Nat had decided upon his course.

CHAPTER VI.

Nat Sees a Friend.

"THERE'S just this much about it," said Nat, when Mr. Nickerson had been laid away in a little grove of evergreens behind the barn, and the neighbors had gone home one after the other and the family had returned to the house, "it is going to be something of a job for me to go down there and get that money. In the first place there is Jonas, who will be furious when he finds that I have run away from home, especially if he thinks I am going to make something by it. He will follow me night and day, and I can't make a move of any sort without he will see it. Then he will bring me home and won't I ketch it, though?"

This bothered Nat more than any thing else. He wanted some little time to think seriously

about the way to beat Jonas at his own game, and went into the barn, drew a milk-stool to the threshold so that he could see anybody that approached him from the house and sat down to go over the points again.

"I have got to have help," thought Nat, "and there is only one boy in the settlement that I can trust; and when it comes to that, I can't trust him, either. He is a lazy, good-for-nothing fellow, and worse than all, I dare not tell him what I am looking after. I must go it alone if I can; but if I find that I can't do it, I must see Peleg Graves about it."

Come to look at the matter Nat was in bad straits, and that was a fact. Of course there were plenty of boys he could have got to assist him, but the trouble was he did not know any of them. He and Caleb were much alike in this respect. The families around them were a little better off than they were, nobody liked Jonas on account of his shiftless ways, and his boys, Nat and Caleb, had been brought up to follow very much in his footsteps, and his bad example had a

deteriorating effect on their character—they were like dogs without a master. That was the way Nat looked at it, and it was the source of infinite annoyance to him.

"Whenever I go down town I can just go alone," Nat had often said to himself. "All the boys there have their friends who are glad to see them. It is 'Hello, Jim!' or 'Hello, Tom!' here and there and everywhere; but if any one looks at me he seems to say: 'What you doing here, Nat? You have not any business to come to town.' And I have more money to spend than any of them. But Peleg has never been that way. He has always seemed glad to see me, but I think the candy I was eating had something to do with it."

After long reflection Nat finally made up his mind that he would call upon Peleg and see what he had to say about it; but there was one thing on which he was fully resolved: He would not let Peleg know what they were searching for until they found the money. He was not going to stay about Jonas's house any longer—that was another thing that he had decided upon;

and something happened just then to make him adhere to this decision. The door of the house opened at this point in his meditations and Caleb came out. Of course he was very solemn, almost any body would be if one had died so near him, but he came along toward Nat as if he had something on his mind.

"Well, Nat, your friend has gone at last," said he, by way of beginning the conversation.

"That is a fact. He was the only friend I had about the house."

"You will not have any more money to buy tobacco for him, will you?" asked Caleb. "What are you going to do?"

"How did I get any money to buy any tobacco for him?" inquired Nat. That was just what Nat had been doing for a number of years, but how did Caleb find it out?

"Oh, you can't fool me," said Caleb, with a laugh. "I saw him go into the fence corner the day before he died and take a plug of tobacco out of there. I did not say any thing to pap about it, for I did not know but it was some secret busi-

ness that you and old man Nickerson had. I did not want to go back on you—"

"If he found any tobacco there he must have got it himself," said Nat, for he did not care to listen any more to the falsehoods Caleb was about to utter. "I don't know any thing about it."

"Aw, now, what is the use of fooling in that way? I would like to know how Mr. Nickerson could have got any tobacco for himself. He has not been to town in two years to my certain knowledge. You got it the last time you were there and stowed it away where he could find it."

Nat was amazed at this revelation. In spite of all his cunning Caleb had succeeded in getting upon his secret at last. If the latter told his father of it he would feel the switch sure enough; that is if he stayed about the premises. Without making any reply he picked up his stool, moved it back where it belonged and made ready to walk out of the barn.

"You see I am on to those little tricks of yours," said Caleb. "Don't go yet for I have something to say to you. Now I will tell you

this to begin with, Nat Wood: You know where Mr. Nickerson had the rest of that money hidden."

"What money?" asked Nat, innocently.

"The money he had hidden when he came here," Caleb almost shouted, doubling up his fists as though he had more than half a mind to strike Nat for professing so much ignorance. "Pap says you know where it is and he is going to have it out of you, too."

"I will bet you he don't," said Nat to himself. "That money is mine and if I don't have it, it can stay there until it rots."

"Now I will tell you what we will do, Nat," continued Caleb, dropping his threatening manner and laying his hand patronizingly on Nat's shoulder. "Me and you will keep this still from pap, and go down to Manchester and dig up that money. Oh man alive, won't we live high—"

"You seem to think it, if there is any of it at all, is in the ground," interrupted Nat.

"Where else should it be put? If it is in the ground no one can stumble on it while he is roam-

ing around through the woods. I will go with you and will start now, if you say so."

"Well, if you are going down to Manchester to look for that money, which I don't believe is there, you can go," said Nat. "But I will stay here. I am not going to dig around unless I can make something by it."

"Oh, come on now, Nat," said Caleb, coaxingly. "You know where it is and I will bet on it."

"If you do bet on it you will lose whatever you bet. But I have already had my say. I won't go down to Manchester with you."

"If you don't go I will tell pap," said Caleb, growing angry again.

"You can run and tell him as soon as you please. If I could see the money sticking up before me this minute I would not give you a cent of it. It does not belong to you."

"Then I bet you I am going to tell pap," said Caleb, who was so nearly beside himself that he walked up and down the barn swinging his hands about his head. "You will get that switch

over your shoulders before you go to bed to-night. Whoop-pe! I would not have the licking you will get for anything."

Caleb marched away as if he were afraid he would forget his errand before he got to the house, and Nat leaned against the door-post and watched him. There was one good reason why Caleb would not tell his father of the tobacco hidden in the fence corner, and that was the fear that the switch would be used upon himself. Why had he not told his father of it when he came from town? Jonas was in just the right mood to use that switch then, and he would have beaten Nat most unmercifully until he got at the full history of the tobacco money. But Caleb had let it go for three days now, and perhaps Jonas felt differently about it. Nat did not know this. He stood there in the door of the barn waiting for Jonas to come, but he waited in vain. Nat was doing some heavy thinking in the meantime, and he finally concluded that he would go and see Peleg and have the matter settled before he went any further. With a parting glance at the house

he put the bushes that lined the potato patch between them, broke into a run and in a quarter of an hour he was at Peleg's barn. Peleg was there. He was engaged in getting some corn ready to go to the mill and he was husking it.

"Well, Nat, where are you going to find another friend like Mr. Nickerson was to you?" was the way he greeted Nat when he came into the barn.

"I don't know," was Nat's reply. "I am left alone in the world. There is nobody who cares a cent whether I live or die."

When Peleg saw what humor Nat was in, how solemn he talked about the loss of his friend, he faced about on his seat and looked at him. Any boy who had been in Nat's place would have been satisfied that Peleg could not be trusted, and would have turned away from him to look elsewhere for a friend. He was not a bad looking boy, but he had a kind of sneaking, hang-dog way with him that did not go far toward making his friends. But he had friends and that was the worst of it. It was a sort of policy with Peleg to

agree to every thing that any body said to him. He did that with an object, and Nat always thought that he listened with the intention of learning something. Perhaps if we follow him closely we shall see how nearly he drew Nat on to tell him all about the money and the plans he had laid for obtaining possession of it.

"'Shaw! I would not talk that way," said Peleg, throwing an ear of corn into the pile. "You have got friends enough here. There is Caleb and Jonas—"

"I reckon you don't know what sort of friends they are to me," Nat interposed.

"Well, between I and you, I have often thought that they might have used you a little better," said Peleg, sinking his voice almost to a whisper. "Jonas uses that switch on you most too much."

"Yes, and he has done that for the last time. I am not going to stand it any longer."

"What are you going to do—run away from home?"

"I am going to run away from Jonas. I

don't call that my home—I never had one; but I want to get away and make my own living."

"That's right, my boy; that's right. You will make a better living than you do there. Look at the clothes you wear!"

"I will have better before long," said Nat, crossing one leg over the other when he saw that Peleg was looking steadily at the huge rent in his overalls.

"Say," whispered Peleg, getting upon his feet and approaching his face close to Nat's. "Did old Nickerson leave you any money? You need not be afraid to talk to me about that," he continued, seeing that Nat looked down at the ground and hesitated. "They say that the old man was, or had been, powerful rich, and if he was a friend to any body in that house he ought to be to you."

"I know he was my friend. He always had something kind to say to me."

"I knew it; I knew it all the time. Say! Jonas has not used up all that thousand dollars that the old man gave him?"

"What do you know about that?" asked Nat, in surprise. "Has Jonas been talking about it?"

"I won't say that he has or that he hasn't," said Peleg, with a knowing shake of his head. "I don't mind telling you, for I know it won't go any further, that I have heard something about it. You would not expect me to say more without breaking my word, and that is something I never do. But I tell you that he has got a heap of that thousand dollars left."

"That's what I have often thought. Where has he got it hidden?"

"That's another thing I must not tell you, but I know where, or at least I can come within a thousand miles of it, where he hides it. You see I know a heap of things that people don't think I do. If you should tell me that you know where that money is—"

"But I don't," said Nat. "I know where some of it is—that is the most of his fortune is concealed."

"Aha!" said Peleg while a smile, a very faint smile which nobody would have noticed,

overspread his face. He did not give utterance to this expression but said it to himself, while Nat himself, always on the lookout for some such signs, did not know how extremely delighted he was by it. Peleg was in a fair way to learn all about it. "If you should tell me where this money is hidden," he went on after controlling himself, "I would die before any one should find out from me the exact spot. You see the way the thing works with me is this: If a person tells you a secret, that is yours to keep. Don't tell any body of it; and in a very short time people will learn that you can be trusted."

"I don't know just where this money is," said Nat, and he hesitated a long while before he said the next words. "I know where the papers are."

"What papers?"

"The papers that tell where the money is hidden."

"Where are they?"

"I have got them safe and I should like to see any body find them."

"That's right; keep them safe," said Peleg, although he was much disappointed because the papers were not instantly produced. "Don't you let a living soul into it unless you find some one to tell the secret to."

"I am going down to look those papers up now," said Nat.

"Down where?"

"Down to Manchester," replied Nat; whereupon that same smile came upon Peleg's face once more. He was thinking how he was going to work to get a sight at those papers.

"It is going to be no easy task to go down there and find the papers all by myself," continued Nat, walking back and forth across the floor and wondering how in the world he was going to propose the matter to Peleg. "You see the minute I go away Jonas will suspect something, and if there is any point he will go for it will be Manchester."

"That's a fact" said Peleg, a bright idea striking him. "And if he found you there your

chance of digging up the papers would be up stump. When do you want to go?"

"I would go now, this very night, if I had some one to go with me. I would find the money, if there is any, and go away where I am not known."

"That is just what I would do," replied Peleg, with sundry motions of his head which he thought added emphasis to his words. "Then nobody can ask you where you got so many stamps."

"I don't fear for that," said Nat, hastily. "I want everybody to know where I got them. I will get away and put them in the bank; then I should like to see any body get hold of them."

"That's the idea. When you once get it into the bank it is safe. You say you want somebody to help you. That shows you are wise. If there is any body on top of this broad earth who will be up to tricks, it is that Jonas Keeler."

"There is Caleb," suggested Nat. "He won't come out where any body can see him, but

he will sneak around in the bushes. Jonas and Caleb will go together."

"Oh, Caleb," said Peleg, contemptuously. "Caleb is a fellow to be—Well, I reckon we would best look out for him too," he added, for it suddenly occurred to him that the more persons Nat had against him the greater need he would have for somebody to protect him. "If there is any body can get away with Caleb, I am the one. There ain't any scheme that boy is up to that I can't see through. I will go halvers with you on that money, or rather the papers that will tell where it is hidden, when we get it."

"Then you and I can't hitch," replied Nat, surprised at the proposition. "I can not pay any such sum as that."

"What for?" demanded Peleg. "You are going to make as much as three or four thousand dollars by it."

"I don't know what I will make and I don't care. It will be enough to take me away from the house in which I now live, and that is all I want. I might as well go home."

"Well, what will you give? Maybe you think it is fun to go down there and beat Jonas and Caleb when they are trying to get the money or the papers away from you? I shall want good pay for doing that."

"I will give you good pay; more than double what you can make here. I will give you a dollar a day, payment to begin when we strike Manchester."

It was now Peleg's turn to be astonished. He stared hard at Nat to see if he was in earnest, and then went back to his seat and began husking corn.

CHAPTER VII.

Mr. Graves Is Astonished.

THERE were two very badly disappointed boys in Peleg Graves's barn that day, and each one thought that he had good grounds for it.

"The little fule!" said Peleg, spitefully snatching up an ear of corn which happened to be nearest to him. "Here he is, almost rolling in wealth, and he won't go halvers with me on that money. A dollar a day! Well, that is more than I could get for shucking corn or digging potatoes these times, and now Peleg, I want to ask you a question: Did you make a mistake there? I reckon you did. Suppose he makes a go of it and finds the papers—'Shaw! I can see through a ladder as plain as he can. The papers are the money; that's what's the matter. And suppose

he finds it with my help, what is there to hinder me from getting up some dark night and taking the money—Whoop-pee! Why did not I think of that?"

"I reckon I may as well go home, and I am sorry that I ever came up here," said Nat to himself, as he walked listlessly about the barn floor. "I have put Peleg on his guard now, and he will make another one that I will have to fight in order to get that money. Peleg would go halvers with me on that money! I will give him a dollar a day and that is every cent I will give him."

"Are you off, Nat?" inquired Peleg, facing around on his stool again.

"Yes, I might as well," replied Nat, who had started for home. "You want altogether too much for helping me."

"Well, now, hold on. Don't go yet. Maybe you and I can come to some understanding. You don't think it is worth while to watch Jonas and Caleb, but I tell you—"

"Yes, I do. But supposing I don't find the money? Then I can't pay you a thing."

"That's so," said Peleg, for the thought was new to him. "I did not think of that. Now see here; I will tell you how we will fix this thing. You want me to stay with you until you find the money, don't you?"

"Of course I do," said Nat.

"Well, you give me a dollar a day—But hold on. Have you got any money at all? I had better know that before we start."

"Oh, yes, I have as much as—as ten dollars, and I will give you your pay every night."

"Where did you get ten dollars?" asked Peleg, who was very much surprised. "Why don't you buy a new pair of overalls?"

"I have my reasons. They are good ones, too. Are you going with me or ain't you? We have some other little matters to decide, and it is getting along toward dark."

"If you say so we will go tonight," replied Peleg, getting upon his feet again.

"What will you say to your folks?"

"I will tell them that I am going out after the cows, or any thing else that I think of. My

folks won't trouble us, I will bet on that. But we have got to have something to eat."

"I have thought of that, and I can buy everything we want in Manchester—every thing except the meat. You have a gun—"

"Yes; but we must get some powder and shot for that. I am all out."

"We can do that, too. Now I will tell you what I have decided upon."

The two boys drew closer together and for fifteen minutes there was some whispering done between them. At the end of that time it was all over and the boys departed satisfied—at least one of them was.

"I am afraid I made a mistake in coming here at all," was what Nat said to himself. "I ought to have gone on and done the best I could by myself. Peleg is up to something and he will bear watching. Do you suppose he means to run down and tell Jonas about my running away?"

This thought created consternation in Nat's mind and he faced about and looked at the barn in which he had left Peleg. But if the truth must

be told, Peleg had no intention of going near Jonas. He was too sharp to throw away the easy means he had of making a fortune by doing that. When Nat went away he leaned against the haymow, or rather the place where it would have been if there had been any hay there, and broke into a silent but hearty fit of merriment.

"Peleg, the thing you have often wanted has come to you at last," he whispered, walking to the door and peeping slyly out to see if Nat had really gone. "Your fortune has come to you at last. Now what be I going to do; for I must get away from here as soon as it comes dark. In the first place I will go in and tell pap about it."

Peleg hurried to the house without taking pains to shut the barn door, and broke into the living room where his father and mother were sitting engaged in smoking. This was the way in which they always passed their time when they could find nothing better to do, and that happened very frequently.

"Have you got that corn all shucked?" inquired his father.

"Naw; and what's more, I ain't a-going to shuck no more to-night," replied Peleg.

"What's to do now?"

"Well I will tell you," said Peleg, drawing a chair without any back close in front of the fire. "I have got a chance to make a fortune; but if I tell you what it is you must go halvers with me, or I shan't tell you a thing."

Mr. Graves and his wife were both amazed. They took their pipes from their mouths, straightened up and looked hard at Peleg to see if he were in earnest.

"You remember old man Nickerson, I reckon, don't you?" continued Peleg. "Well, he's gone dead, you know, and he has willed a whole pile of money, or papers and such things which shows where the money is, and Nat wants me to go down to Manchester with him and help dig it up."

"Who teld you about this?" demanded Mr. Graves.

"Nat was here not two minutes ago and he

told me himself. He's going as soon as it comes dark."

"Now the best thing you can do is to run over and tell Jonas about it," said Mr. Graves, knocking the ashes from his pipe and getting upon his feet. "The idea of that little snipe having a whole pile of money—it is not to be thought of."

"Well, I just ain't a-going to say a word to Jonas about it," said Peleg. "They isn't any body knows about that money excepting you and me. I am going to have it all."

Mr. Graves looked hard at his son again and finally took his chair once more. He saw in a moment what Peleg was up to, but he wanted to hear the whole plan.

"What you going to do? How be I going to help you?"

It did not take Peleg many minutes to make his father understand what he had decided to do, and in fact there was not much for him to explain. He was going to get his gun and go over to Nat's house and wait until he was ready. When he

came out he was going to join him, and together they would go to Manchester and camp out until they found the papers which would tell them where the money was concealed. After that was done he would be ready to begin operations. Mr. Graves might blacken up his face to resemble a negro, come up and overpower them and take the money, or he might watch his opportunity and approach the camp while the two boys were away buying provisions.

"Who told you about this?" said Mr. Graves, who was lost in admiration of Peleg's cunning. It sounded like some novel that he used to read in his schoolboy days.

"Nobody didn't tell me of it," said Peleg. "I got it all up out of my own head. Don't you think it will work?"

"Of course it will. How long are you going to stay down to Manchester?"

"I didn't ask him about that; probably not more'n three or four days."

"But you have got to live while you are

looking for the papers. Have you got any thing cooked, S'manthy?"

"That's taken care of, for Nat is going to support us. He has as much as ten dollars that he is going—"

"Where did he get ten dollars? It looks to me as though that boy has been stealing."

"Couldn't old man Nickerson have given him that sum while he was alive? That boy has come honestly by his money, and, look here, pap, don't you fool yourself. If Nat has got ten dollars he has got twenty dollars; and don't you forget it."

"Do you reckon that old man Nickerson gave him all that money?" said Mr. Graves, who was profoundly astonished at Nat's wealth.

"I don't know where else he could have got it. Now I want some clothes to take with me and my gun. What be you going to do, pap, when we find that money?"

"You have got to find the papers first."

"Now just listen at you," said Peleg, with evident disgust. "There ain't no papers there,

When we find the place where the thing is hidden, it will be money, and nothing else. Nat ain't got no papers. You hear me?"

"Then I reckon I had best wait a while until I see you again," said Mr. Graves, reflectively. "If you find the money I want to take it all."

"How much will that be, Peleg?" said the woman, who had been so surprised at this conversation that she had taken no part in it. "It will be as much as three or four hundred dollars, won't it?"

"Three or four hundred fiddle-sticks!" said Peleg. "Old man Nickerson was worth a power of money, and if he has got any hidden it all amounts to three or four thousand dollars."

"Good lands!" gasped Mrs. Graves, settling back in her chair. "I can have some good clothes with that. Three or four thousand! I reckon I'd best fill up for another smoke."

Peleg began to stir about and in a short time he had collected his wardrobe, which did not amount to much seeing that he carried the whole of it in an old valise, and his gun that was going

to furnish them with game while they were looking for the money. It was about as worthless a thing as ever was fashioned in wood and iron, but still it managed to bring down a squirrel or rabbit every time Peleg went hunting.

"Now if any body comes here and wants to know where I am, you can tell him that you don't know," said Peleg, as he slung his bundle on his single barrel and put the whole on his shoulder. "You had better come down that way to-morrow, pap, but let me tell you one thing: You had better keep out of sight. If Nat so much as suspects that there is somebody watching us, he will quit the work right then and there, and we shan't find any money."

Mr. Graves said that he would take abundant care of that, and Peleg opened the door and went out. There was no "good-by" about it. As soon as he was gone Mr. Graves proceeded to fill up for another smoke.

"That there is a powerful good boy who has just went out," said he. "What on earth should we do without him? I tell you, S'manthy, we

are going to be wonderful rich in a few days from now. I know of three or four horses that I want—"

With this introduction Mr. Graves went on to enumerate the various horses and cows and farming utensils he needed and must have to make his calling as agriculturist successful, and when he got through his wife took up the strain, and by the time that twelve o'clock came they had not only three or four thousand dollars of Mr. Nickerson's money laid out, but they had some more thousands besides. It is hard to tell what they did not provide for. They had a new house built up, the weeds all cut down, an orchard in full bearing where the worthless brier patch used to stand, and every thing fixed up in first-class shape. But they got tired of this after a while, and went to bed.

"Pe-leg!" shouted Mr. Graves, when he awoke at daylight. "It is high time you was up. Well, now, what am I calling him for? He is a long way from here by this time, and, S'manthy, perhaps he has got onto that money after all."

"He could not have found it before he got where it was," suggested Mrs. Graves. "He must camp out some time, else why did he take his gun with him?"

"That's so," said Mr. Graves, after thinking a moment. "I don't feel like myself at all this morning; do you, S'manthy? Now I have got to get up and build the fire; but I don't mind that. In a little while we'll have somebody to build it for us. Who's that coming there?" added Mr. Graves, who, as he drew on his trousers, went to the window and glanced up and down the road. "If there ain't Jonas I am a Dutchman. He wants to see what has become of Nat."

"You won't tell him, of course?" said his wife.

"Mighty clear of me. I don't know where he is and neither do you."

The silence that followed on the inside of the cabin was broken at last by the hasty crunch of earth and stones outside the door, and then Jonas laid his heavy hand upon it.

"Who's that?" shouted Mr. Graves.

"It is me; don't you know Jonas?" answered a voice. "Get up here. I want to ask you a question."

"All right. I will soon be there. Now, old woman, you cover up and don't open your head while he is here."

In a few minutes Mr. Graves opened the door and the two men greeted each other cordially.

"Howdy, Jonas. What started you out so early? How's all your family?"

"My family is all right, but I am just now hunting for that boy, Nat. Ain't seen anything of him, have you?"

"Nat? No; has he run away?" asked Mr. Graves, accidentally letting out the very thing which he was afraid his wife would mention to Jonas if she were allowed to talk. "I mean—you have been using that switch on him lately," he hastily added, after he had caught his breath.

"No, I hain't, but I wish I had," declared Jonas, for the idea of Nat's running away was the very thing that was uppermost in his mind.

"I have used that boy altogether too well; and now that old man Nickerson has gone, he has cleared out."

"Well, now, what does the fule boy want to run away for?" said Mr. Graves, looking down at the ground. "He will want some money, if he is going to do that."

"He has plenty of it, or thinks he has," said Jonas, angrily. "You ain't seen Peleg around here lately, have you?"

"Peleg? No, he has gone out after the cows," said Mr. Graves; and a moment later, as if to show how very much mistaken he was, one of the cows in the barnyard set up a prolonged lowing as if to inquire why somebody did not come out and milk her. "I declare, there's the cows already," added Mr. Graves, not at all abashed. "That boy is around here somewhere. Pe-leg," he shouted, looking around as though he expected Peleg to appear.

"You needn't call to him that way, pap, 'cause he ain't there," said Mrs. Graves under

the bed clothes. "Didn't you hear him say that he was going fishing to-day?"

"That's so; so I did. What do you want of Peleg, Jonas?"

"I just wanted to know if he could tell me where Nat was; but if he ain't here, of course he can't tell me. You're sure he ain't gone to Manchester along with Nat?"

"No," said Mr. Graves, as if he were surprised to hear it. "What does he want to go down to Manchester for? If he don't come home pretty soon I will go after him."

"Nat has got an idea that there is some money down there, and he has gone after it. If he only knew it, I have got all the money that was there long ago."

Mr. Graves was really surprised now.

"The old man did not have but a thousand dollars, and he gave that to me to spend for him," said Jonas. "When that boy gets through looking I hope he will come back."

The speaker went away without saying an-

other word, and Mr. Graves stood in his door and watched him go. If Jonas told the truth Peleg had his journey for nothing.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Storekeeper Speaks.

VERY different were Nat Wood's feelings as he walked slowly toward the place he called home. He was certain that during the last hour of his life he had made a bad mistake in that he yielded to his first impulse and took Peleg into his confidence. But the thing had been done, Peleg knew that the money was there, or somewhere about Manchester, and now he had to watch his corners very closely in order to succeed at all.

"There is one thing about it," said Nat, as he went up behind the bushes which stood between the potato patch and the house. "I will keep a close watch of Peleg, and if I have any reason to suppose that he is working for himself, I will lead him off the track and go somewhere

else. Peleg is a pretty sharp boy, but I don't believe he can get ahead of me."

While Nat was thinking this matter over he drew up behind the bushes and took a long and earnest survey of the house. There was no one stirring around it. Having made sure that no one was watching him Nat hurried to a fence corner, not the one that Mr. Nickerson went to in order to get his plug of tobacco, but another one that lay further off, and after a few minutes' search arose to his feet with two articles in his hand which he hastily crammed into his pocket. One was a roll of money—he did not look it over for he knew how much there was in it—and the other was the two leaves of "Baxters' Saints' Rest," still pasted together, which told him where the money was concealed. The money was what he had left from the sum Mr. Nickerson had last given him for the purchase of tobacco.

"I don't see what is the need of my taking these two leaves with me," said Nat, as he pushed the remnants of the twigs and bushes back to the place which they had occupied before. "Peleg

might find it and then know as much about the money as I do. I reckon I had best get that in my head and then destroy the leaves."

To think with Nat was to act. He produced the two leaves from his pocket, seated himself upon the ground and tore them open. The stray leaf, the one on which the diagram that showed where the money was concealed, fell out; and although it was pretty dark so that he could barely trace the lines, they were made with a heavy lead pencil, and furthermore there were but two lines on the page. The first led from a pile of rubbish —Nat did not know what else to call it; it probably intended to represent the ruins of Mr. Nickerson's house—to a second pile of rubbish, which was doubtless intended to show the pile of briers. The second line ran across a little wavering stream which was intended to stand for the brook, up to another pile, and there it stopped. If Nat could only find that pile, his fortune was secure.

It did not take Nat long to make himself master of this diagram, and hastily putting the leaves back again, he buried them in the hole from

which he had taken them out, smoothing over the leaves so that no one would suspect that anybody had been there.

"So far so good," said Nat, with a long-drawn sigh of relief. "I don't believe that either Jonas or Caleb will find them there. Now the next thing is something else."

It was to separate ten dollars from his roll of bills so that he could show them to Peleg when he came to pay for the various things at Manchester. If he showed more than that amount something would be added to Peleg's suspicions, and no doubt it would lead to an open rupture. The rest of the bills he stowed away in his hat, pressing them down tightly between the outside and the lining, and holding them there by means of a pin which he took from his sleeve. His work was all done now, and he was ready to meet Peleg as soon as he put in an appearance. But in order to make sure that he had not been watched Nat drew along the fence corner into the bushes, until he came within sight of the house again. There was no one there, and no one in the barn, either;

so he concluded that he had done this part of his work without being seen.

"If I can get through with the rest without having some one to see me, I shall be glad of it," said Nat, going past the house and out to the bars. "Good-by, old home, for it is the only home I have had since I can remember. I hope some day to have a place that I can call my own."

His soliloquy was interrupted by the appearance of a person on the road who moved and acted in a way that showed him that the time for operations had come. It was Peleg. He carried his single barrel over his shoulder, supporting an old-fashioned valise which contained his change of underwear.

"Well, I am all ready," said Peleg, in a whisper.

"So am I," said Nat.

"Why, you have not taken a thing with you," said Peleg, when he looked around to see Nat pick up something. "Are you going to come back here after your clothes?"

"All the clothes I have in the world I have

got upon my back," said Nat, holding up both hands and turning slowly around so that his companion could see him. "I am ready to go if you are."

"You must have a clean shirt if nothing more. What will you do when the one you have on now is all soiled?"

"I will take it off and wash it."

"*You* will?" exclaimed Peleg, in unbounded astonishment. "Don't you have no women to do that sort of work? My mother always washes my clothes."

"Well, you are lucky to have a mother. I have had none since I can remember. I have to do all such little things myself."

"This beats me. What did you say to Jonas?"

"Not a thing. I have not seen him since I saw you."

"Have you got your papers?" said Peleg, who was particularly anxious on that score. "You had better give them to me; because when

Jonas overhauls us he will search all your clothes."

"Let him search," said Nat, turning upon Peleg and looking at him as closely as he could in the dark. "I have got my papers, but they are right in here," he added, touching his forehead with his right hand. "He won't get them out of there."

"*Well!*" said Peleg, looking down at the ground they were so rapidly leaving behind. "That's a pretty way to do business. You have got me to help you in looking for that money, and you had ought to let me into the whole of it."

"In other words, I must tell you my secret, must I?" demanded Nat, stopping in his headlong gait. "I did not agree to do that. You may go back on me the first thing."

"No, I won't; I pledge you my word that I will stay by you. Now if you don't tell me all of it I won't go."

These were very pleasant words to Nat Wood. He had been wondering all the time how he was to be rid of Peleg, and now he was going

to accomplish his object without half trying. Peleg stopped when he uttered this threat, but Nat kept on as fast as ever.

"I tell you I won't go if you don't tell me just what you are going to do and all about it." said Peleg, taking his bundle off his shoulders.

"All right. Then stay where you are. I can get along without you."

"You forget Jonas and Caleb," said Peleg, raising his voice as to reach the ears of Nat who was rapidly widening the distance between them. "Who is going to watch them while you are doing the digging? The little fule," muttered Peleg, raising his bundle to his shoulder again and hurrying after Nat "What has come over him to make him so mighty independent all at once? A little while ago he was just begging me to go with him; but now he wants to shake me off altogether. Hold up, Nat."

But Nat was past holding up for Peleg or anybody else. He kept on his way without changing his pace, and when at last Peleg overtook him he had passed a half a mile down the road.

"What's the use of you being in such a hurry, Nat?" panted Peleg. "I can't keep up with you if you go so fast."

"I've got to hurry in order to get to my camping grounds before daylight," replied Nat. "If you want to go with me, come on; if you don't, stay back."

"But, Nat, it ain't right for you to do all the work by yourself," said Peleg.

"I don't intend to do it all. You must do some of it, if you go with me. I won't pay you a dollar a day for doing nothing."

"Of course. I expect to do some of it; but how can I know what to work at unless you tell me something."

"I will tell you what I want as soon as we come to our camping ground, and that ought to satisfy you," said Nat, who plainly saw that he was not going to get rid of Peleg so easily. "I may want you to watch for Jonas while I work."

"Well, if you do that, it will be right into my hand," said Peleg, to himself. "Only I would

rather watch for pap. If I see him, I won't let you know a thing about it."

Seeing that Nat was neither to be frightened nor coaxed into revealing his secret, Peleg finally gave up the attempt in disgust, and hurried along by Nat's side toward Manchester. Nat had but little to say to him for he was thinking over what was to be done when they once reached their camping grounds. He must be rid of Peleg in some way, and the more he thought about it the more he saw that his success depended entirely upon his finding the money alone and unaided.

"If ever a boy deserves kicking I am the one," Nat kept saying to himself. "Why didn't I leave Peleg alone husking his corn? He would have been safe there, but now he has got onto my back and I can't shake him off. Can I get him to go back to the store after some provisions, while I look for the money? That's a plan worth thinking of."

The way to Manchester seemed wonderfully long, it is always long if one is anxious to reach a place, and it was after daylight when they came

within sight of it. Fortunately the stores were open and the boys had no difficulty in buying what they wanted. The first thing was the ammunition for Peleg's shotgun; and when that had been purchased and stowed away in the boy's valise, the provisions came next, and they found that they had more than they could carry.

"There are other things to come," said Nat, pulling out his ten dollars at which Peleg glanced with envious eyes. "I must get a spade and pick-ax before I go any further."

"Why, what do you want to do with them?" asked Peleg, in surprise.

"How am I going to do any digging without them?" asked Nat in reply. "There is no telling how deep the money is in the ground."

Peleg was obliged to be content with this explanation although he was not satisfied with it. He could not bear to see any of Nat's money go for such useless things as a spade and pick-ax, because he calculated at some future time to handle all that money himself. And when they were

purchased there was another thing that filled him with astonishment.

"I wish you would set these implements away somewhere, together with the provisions that we shall not be able to take with us, until Peleg comes after them," said Nat to the storekeeper. "He will be after them bright and early to-morrow morning."

"All right," said the storekeeper. "I will set the whole thing right here in this corner, and if my partner is in here you will know them when you see them. Any thing else that I can show you?"

"Nothing else, thank you," replied Nat. "I have every thing I need."

"What are you boys going to do up there in the woods?" asked the storekeeper. "You are not going after rabbits with nothing but a single barrel shotgun. You won't get enough to pay you for your ammunition."

"Oh, no; we are going up there to see about some timber that belongs to us."

"Well, don't let the ghosts catch you," said the man, with a laugh.

"Ghosts!" replied Peleg; and he let the butt of his single barrel heavily down upon the floor.

"Yes; there is lots of them up there."

"Why—why—whereabouts?" inquired Peleg; and it was all he could do to pronounce the words so that the storekeeper could understand him.

"Well, I don't know that they have any particular place, but the heft of them appears up about old man Nickerson's farm," said the man; and he drew a little on his imagination because he saw that Peleg was frightened. "If anybody goes on that place he wants to look out. You see," here the storekeeper leaned his elbows on the counter and sank his voice almost to a whisper. "They used to tell here before the war that the old man was worth a power of money, and the rebels came here to gobble it up."

"Did they get any?" asked Peleg.

"Naw they didn't. I was in that party and I know just what they got. It was all in gold, too,

but the old fellow had it hidden so that we could not find it. We took him off and put him in the army, but he was too old to be of any use there, and so we turned him loose. There's been a power of men up there looking for it, but they stay just one night."

"They see the ghosts, do they?" said Nat.

"That's what they do," said the storekeeper, looking all around the room as if he expected to see something advancing upon him. "And I tell you they don't wait until daylight comes. I have seen as many as two or three on my porch waiting for me to open the store, and the tales they told were just awful. They say—Whew! I'll bet you don't get me up there for no five thousand dollars."

"What do they say?" asked Nat. "Is old man Nickerson among the ghosts?"

"Yes, he is there, and he is the worst one in the lot; but the worst of it is, he has been somewhere and got ten or a dozen other ghosts to help him along, and the screeching they keep up is enough to drive one crazy. But I reckon you

boys ain't going up as far as old man Nickerson's."

"That is the place where we are going," said Nat. "We shall not stop until we get there."

"Among all them ghosts?" exclaimed the storekeeper, and he staggered back from the counter as if Nat had aimed a blow at him. "Well, good-by. I shall never see you again," added the man, as he straightened up and thrust his hand out toward Nat. "You need not think to be free of them for they come to see everybody that goes there."

"But the others came back in safety and so can I," said Nat.

"Yes; but the last time they appeared to a person they told him that the next one who came there he would leave his bones for the vultures to pick over," said the man, and he tried to shiver when he uttered the words. "I would not go up there, if I was you."

"I want to see what a ghost looks like. Come on, Peleg. We have wasted too much time al-

ready. You will have those things ready for Peleg tomorrow?"

"Yes, provided he is able to come after them. And say, Peleg. I want you to take particular notice of the way the ghosts look and what they say and what they do, and all that—"

"You had better get somebody else to go up there, if that is what you want to find out," said Peleg. "If I see one of them, or hear him coming through the bushes, I will start a running till you can't see me for the dust. If Nat isn't afraid of the ghosts, I am."

Nat had by this time taken as many of the provisions as he could carry and had left the store, and Peleg, after some hesitation, prepared to follow him. Nat did not believe in ghosts; and even if ghosts were there and Mr. Nickerson was among them, he would not let the rest of the spirits trouble him, for he had given him the money before his death, and had told him just where it was concealed. But his nerves now were not as firm as they were before he went into that store. He did not know what he had to contend

with up there in the woods, and the woods were so far away from everybody that it was useless for him to call for help in case he needed it

"But I am going after that money," said he, firmly, as he walked along as if there were no such things as ghosts in the world. "It is up there, there was not any ghosts around when it was hidden and I don't believe there are any ghosts now. At least I must see them before I will give it up."

At this moment Peleg overtook him. One glance at his face was enough to show him what he thought about it.

CHAPTER IX.

Peleg Sees Enough.

"SAY, Nat," said Peleg, catching his companion by the arm and speaking almost in a whisper as if he were afraid that the ghosts might overhear him, "don't let's go any further. Let us go back."

"What will we do with all these provisions?" exclaimed Nat.

"Let's take them home and eat them there. I am afraid to go to those woods. Don't you believe in ghosts?"

"I don't know what to say," said Nat, pulling his arm out of Peleg's grasp. "That storekeeper talked as though he meant all he said, did he not? He would not try to scare us."

"No, sir," said Peleg, emphatically. "Let

us go back. I don't believe there is any money hidden around here anyway."

It was no part of Nat's plan to make Peleg think differently. If he thought they were on a wild goose chase, so much the better for Nat. He would go on and prosecute the search, and if he succeeded, no one would be the wiser for it.

"If pap were here," continued Peleg, and then he suddenly stopped.

"Does your father believe in ghosts, too?" asked Nat.

"Of course he does. He has seen them."

"Then of course he believes in them. I must see one before I will put any faith in it."

"But what will you do if you leave your bones up here for the vultures to pick?" urged Peleg, with a shudder. "I reckon you will believe in them then."

"That will be my misfortune and not my fault. So. Mr. Graves believes in ghosts, does he?" said Nat, to himself. "I wish to goodness that I knew whether or not Jonas and Caleb believed in them, too. Somehow I feel more afraid

of those two men than I do of anything else." Then aloud he said: "If I believed as your father does I would not come up here for anything; but I have not seen the ghosts yet, and until I do, I am going to stick to my plan. You can carry the provisions up to Mr. Nickerson's house, can't you, and then you can put them down and go back if you want to."

"And do you mean that you are really going on?" exclaimed Peleg, who was really amazed at the boy's courage.

"Yes, sir, I am going on; and no one will care whether I succeed or not. Come on, Peleg. You must walk faster than that."

There was no use of trying to get rid of Peleg; Nat saw that plainly enough. He increased his pace and Peleg, as if afraid of being left behind, increased his own and readily kept up with him. He did not have any more to say about the ghosts until after they had covered the half of a dozen miles that lay between them and Mr. Nickerson's farm; and then they turned off the road, climbed a fence and found themselves in a

thicket of bushes which enveloped them on all sides so that they could not see two feet in advance of them. Then Peleg's courage gave away altogether.

"I believe I won't go any further," said he; and he made a move as if he were going to put down the provisions he was carrying. "It is awful dark in there, ain't it?"

"Pretty dark," whispered Nat, bending down and trying to see through the bushes. "But this is nothing to what it will be when night comes. If we are going to hear anything we will hear it then. Will you be afraid to come down here to get the spade and pick-ax to-morrow?"

"You just bet I will," answered Peleg, and Nat noticed that his face was as white as it could get. "If you don't get that spade and pick-ax until I bring them up to you, you will wait a long while before you do any digging."

"Well, pick up the provisions and come along," said Nat, who was getting really impatient. "Stay right close behind me, and if I see any ghosts I will shoo them off."

Once more Nat started on and Peleg, not daring to remain behind, gathered up his burden and kept along close on his heels. It was a long way through the bushes to the back of Mr. Nickerson's farm, and with almost every step Peleg heard something that alarmed him; a bird chirped in the thicket close beside him or a ground squirrel vociferously scolded them as they drew near and hurried off to his retreat, and several times he was on the point of throwing down the provisions and taking to his heels. But there was the money that they were after. That had a stronger attraction to him than his fear of the ghosts, and when Nat threw aside the last branch and stepped out into the open field, Peleg was right behind, although he was all out of breath and sweating so, as he affirmed, that he could hear it rattling on the leaves.

"When we go back let us go the other way," panted Peleg, looking around for a place to sit down. "I am just tired out. Now what are you going to do? Here is the spot, and if you have

not got them papers with you, how do you know where to dig?"

"The papers are all in my head where no one will get them," said Nat, laying down his armful of provisions and looking around to see if there was a path that led down the hill. "You stay here and rest, and I will go on and see—"

"Not much I won't stay here," exclaimed Peleg, rising to his feet as Nat started off. "I am going to stay close by you. I wish I had known about the ghosts. I wouldn't have come one peg."

"So do I," said Nat to himself. "If I can get up some way to scare you to-night, I shall be happy.

To have seen Nat go to work one would have supposed that he knew where the money was hidden and all about it. He went as straight as he could go to the corner of the ruins of Mr. Nickerson's house, and there he stopped and his lips moved as if he were holding a consultation with himself.

"Six to one and a half dozen to the other,"

he muttered, as if he were not aware that Peleg was anywhere within reach of him. "That paper is burned up here in the ruins, but I have got it in my head."

"What are you trying to get through yourself, Nat?" said Peleg. "Talk English so that I can understand you."

Nat did not act as though he had heard him at all.

"The next is a beech tree on the right hand side," continued Nat. "Now let me see if that can be found."

"What about the beech tree? There is one down there at the foot of the hill."

Nat had already started off toward the beech tree, and a little way from it found a pile of briers; but did not look at them more than once. He went around on the left hand side of the beech tree, and throwing back his head gazed earnestly into the branches.

"Now whichever way that limb points, it points to the hiding-place of the papers," said Nat. "But there are not any limbs that point

any way. They all seem to point upward to the sky. If this is the tree I'll soon make the limb move. Here, watch that branch and see if it don't stir. Six of one and half a dozen of the other."

"What do you keep saying those words for all the time?" inquired Peleg. "Why don't you talk so that I can understand it?"

"That is a secret that Mr. Nickerson used while he was engaged in burying the papers," said Nat, a bright idea striking him. "Come here and I will tell you all about it," he added, catching Peleg by the arm and drawing his face close to his own. "You see these trees and everything about here is in sympathy with Mr. Nickerson, because he is dead, you know. I might come up here or you might come up here and look for those papers, and if we did not have the secret that Mr. Nickerson used while concealing them, why, we wouldn't know any more about it than we do now. I declare that branch moves; don't you see it?"

Peleg looked earnestly into the tree but could

see nothing. Nat even got hold of him and pulled him around and twisted his head on one side so that he could see the upper part of the tree, but the moving of the limb was something that Peleg could not discern.

"It only moved a little bit so that I could see it," said Nat, in explanation. "You have got to be quick or you can't see it. Now we will go off this way and see if we can find something else."

There was some little thing about this that was certainly uncanny—something that did not look natural to Peleg. The idea of a boy having some mysterious words at his command which made inanimate nature obey him was a new thing to him, and he did not know what to make of it; but Nat seemed to think it was all right and went ahead as if he had been expecting it. He stepped across the brook and moved up the hill, but before he had taken many steps he came back and put his face close to Peleg's again.

"I must tell you one thing so that you will not be frightened," said he, in a whisper.

"When I get on the track of those papers you'll hear something."

"What is it like?" said Peleg, in the same cautious whisper.

"I don't know. It may be like the report of a cannon; or it may be like something else you never heard of. You must keep your mind on those papers while we are looking for them."

Nat went on ahead and in a few moments more he stepped upon the very stone which was buried half way in the earth and covered the hiding place of his money. His heart bounded at the thought. If Peleg was away and he had the pick-ax and spade at his command he would be a rich boy in less than half an hour.

"I don't see it," said he, dolefully.

"Don't see what?" said Peleg. "If you repeat your words once more perhaps it will come to you."

"Six of one and a half dozen of the other," exclaimed Nat; and instantly there came a response that he had not been expecting. A huge dead poplar, which stood on the bank a hundred

feet away, suddenly aroused itself into life and action, took part in Nat's invocation and sent a thrill of terror through him and Peleg. A branch of the tree about fifty feet from the ground, as large as any of the ordinary trees that were standing around them, ceased its hold upon the parent trunk and came with a stunning crash to the ground. Peleg was so startled that he fairly jumped, while Nat stood perfectly thunderstruck.

This was nothing more than the boys had been accustomed to all their lives. Such sounds were not new in the country in which they had been brought up, and when any settler heard a sound like that coming from the woods he said: "Now we are going to have falling weather." An old "deadening" is the best place to watch for omens of this kind. The farmer, not having the time or force to clear his land, cuts away all the underbrush and uses his axe to "circle" the trees so that he can put in his crop. The trees stand there until they dry and rot, all the vitality being taken away from them, and finally drop all their limbs until the trunk stands bare. Nat,

after he had taken time to think twice, knew in a moment what had caused the poplar to shed its limbs, and was aware that it was one of the incidents of his everyday life; but Peleg, who had been warned that something was going to happen if they found the trail of the papers, was frightened out of his wits. After it struck the ground he remained motionless.

"What did I tell you?" whispered Nat. "Didn't I tell you that you would hear something drop?"

"Whew!" stammered Peleg. "I have seen enough of this place. I am going home as quick as I can go."

"Hold on, Peleg," exclaimed Nat, who was overjoyed to hear him talk this way. "We will hear something else pretty soon, and that will let us know that we are close to the papers."

"You can stay and look for them until you are blind," said Peleg, who was taking long strides toward the other side of the brook. "You will never see them papers. I believe you are cahoots with the 'Old Fellow' himself."

As Peleg said this he pointed with his finger toward the ground. He did not care to mention who the "old fellow" was. When he was across the brook he broke into a run and dashed up the hill. He did not even stop to take with him his gun, ammunition or the provisions he had brought up from Manchester. He kept clear of the bushes—you could not have hired Peleg to go through them alone—and when he struck the open field he increased his pace and was out of sight in a moment. Nat waited until he was well under way and then followed him to the top of the bank. He was just in time to see Peleg's coat tails disappear over the bars; and then he dug out at his best gait for home.

"There!" said Nat, taking off his hat and feeling for the extra money he had stowed away. "I am well rid of him, thank goodness. Now I will go to work and make a camp, get something to eat, and to-morrow morning I will go down and get the spade and pick-ax; that is, if the ghosts leave anything of me. But I don't

believe there are any ghosts. The storekeeper said that just to frighten him."

But before Nat began his lean-to he wanted to see the stone that covered his fortune. It seemed strange to him that all he had to do was to pry the stone out of its place, dig for a few minutes and then he would be worth more money than he ever saw.

"There is one thing that I forgot," said he, after he had tested the weight of the stone by trying his strength upon it. "But I will get that to-morrow. I must cut a lever with which to handle this weight."

For the first time in a long while Nat was happy. He would be so that night—there would not anybody come near him after dark—but the next morning he would come back to himself again—sly and cunning, and afraid to make a move in any direction without carefully reconnoitering the ground. Jonas and Caleb had got him in the way of living so.

"But I will soon be free from them," said Nat, as he left the stone walked across the brook

and seated himself proceeded to find some of the cheese and crackers which Peleg had brought up. "I am free from them now; but if they come after me and catch me, why then I have got my whole business to do over again. I hope Peleg will go safely home and spread the story of the ghosts that are living here, for I don't think Jonas will care to face them."

Nat thoroughly enjoyed his meal, for the walk of twenty miles along that rough road was enough to give him an appetite, and all the while he was looking about him and selecting the limbs with which he intended to build his lean-to. He did not expect to be there a great while, not longer than to-morrow at any rate, but he did not believe in sleeping out while there was timber enough at hand to build him a shelter. The lean-to was soon put up, and in a very short space of time all the luggage he had was conveyed under it. A fire would come handy as soon as it grew dark, and all the rest of the time he spent in collecting fuel for it; so that when the sun went down and it began to grow gloomy in the

woods, he was as well sheltered as a boy in his circumstances could expect.

"I am glad that Peleg is not here," said Nat, as he looked all around to make sure that he had not forgotten something, and began another assault on the crackers and cheese. "I know that nothing will come here to bother me, but Peleg would all the while be listening for one of those ghosts to come down on him. There's an owl now. His hooting sounds awful lonely in the woods."

While Nat was stretched out on his bed of boughs listening to the mournful notes of the owl, his thoughts were exceedingly busy with sad remembrances of the old man who had labored so hard to save his money from the rebels, little dreaming that the amount would one day fall into the hands of one who needed it as badly as Nat did.

"I really wish I had some one to enjoy it with me, but I have not got any body," Nat kept saying to himself. "The first thing I will do

will be to get an education; then I can tell what I am going to do."

So saying Nat arose and replenished the fire, then lay down and fell into a quiet sleep. He did not see a ghost nor did he dream of one the whole night.

CHAPTER X.

Peleg's Ghost Story.

"BLESS my lucky stars, Peleg Graves, you clear of Nat Wood at last. Ever since I first met him there at home, when he didn't have a single thing to take with him except the clothes he had on his back, I have been afraid of that fellow. He didn't have but one shirt to bless himself with, and when it got soiled, he would take it off and wash it. The idea of him washing his clothes! I guess he thought that the Old Fellow would wash them." Here Peleg cast frightened glances toward the bushes on each side of the road as if he was fearful that "the other fellow" would suddenly come out at him. He fancied he could almost see him with his flashing eyes, horns on his head and cloven feet all ready to take the rush, but as he went on he began to

gather courage. "And then his having a secret, too, and he wouldn't tell me what it meant. 'Here I am and there I am,' " whispered Peleg, who was so badly frightened that he could not remember the words Nat had used. "Now what did those words mean? I tell you there is somebody helping Nat; you hear me?"

While Peleg was going over his soliloquy in this way he was making good time down the road, and finally he became weary with his head-long pace and slackened his gait to a walk; a fast walk it was, too, so that in a very short while all Nat and his strange words were left behind.

It was twenty miles to the place where Peleg lived, and although faint with hunger and so weary that he could scarcely drag one foot after the other, he never stopped to ask one of the good-hearted settlers for a bite to eat, and never thought of sitting down to rest his tired limbs. He kept on, anxious to get his roof over his head and impatient to hear what his father would have to say about Nat and his doings, until just as the sun was rising he came within sight of the cabin

door and saw Mr. Graves standing there and taking a look at the weather. The man was so surprised to see him that he was obliged to take two looks before he could make up his mind that it was Peleg and nobody else.

"Is that you, Peleg?" he exclaimed, as the boy threw down one of the bars and crawled through it. "Where's the money?"

"Oh, pap!" was all that Peleg could say in reply.

Mr. Graves began to look uneasy. Like all ignorant men he was very superstitious, and he straightway believed that Peleg had seen something that he could not understand.

"Say, Peleg," he added in a lower tone, stepping off the porch and taking the boy by the arm. "What did you see up there in the woods? You have not been to Manchester and back, have you?"

"Yes, I have, too; and if you want to go down there and search for that money, you can go; but I am going to stay here. I wish you

would give me a bite to eat and a drink of water. I am just about dead."

Peleg had by this time reached the porch, and he threw himself down upon it as if he had lost all strength, and rested his head upon his hands. Mr. Graves began to believe that Peleg had seen something that was rather more than his nerves could stand, and went around the house after a drink of water, while his mother, who had been aroused by this time, came to the door. She saw Peleg sitting there with his head buried in his hands, and of course her mother's heart went out to him.

"Oh, Peleg, what is the matter?" she exclaimed.

"Oh, mother, you just ought to hear the words that Nat uses to find out whether or not he is on the trail of those papers," said Peleg, lifting a very haggard face and looking at her.

At that moment Mr. Graves came around the corner of the house with a gourd full of drinking water. Peleg seized it as though he had not had

any for a month, and never let the gourd go until he had drunk the whole of it.

"That makes me feel some better," said he.

"You passed several streams on the way," said Mr. Graves. "Why didn't you stop and get a drink?"

"Oh, pap, I dassent. I can hear those words ringing in my ears now, and I wanted to get so far away that I couldn't hear them. 'Here I am and there I am!' Oh, my soul!"

"Why—what are you trying to get through yourself?" inquired Mr. Graves; and if the truth must be told he drew a little closer to Peleg.

"Well, sir, I am telling you the truth when I say that that there Nat has some dealings with that Fellow down there," said Peleg, pointing toward the ground. "He goes around looking for those papers—"

"Ah! Get out!" exclaimed Graves.

"It is a fact; and if you don't believe it, you can just go down there and watch him as I did. He says that everything, the trees and the rocks and the leaves and the bushes, are in cahoots with

him because he took such good care of old man Nickerson when he was alive, buying him tobacco and such, and that he told him what words to use while looking for those papers. Why, the branches of the trees moved and pointed out the way to him."

Mr. Graves was completely amazed by this revelation, and seated himself on the porch beside Peleg; while S'manthy gasped for breath and found it impossible for her to say anything. She lifted her hands in awe toward the rafters of the porch for a moment, closed her eyes, and then her hands fell helplessly by her side. She shook her head but could not utter a sound.

"It is a fact, I tell you; that isn't all I have seen, either," said Peleg. "When we came to Manchester and Nat wanted to buy some grub and things—pap, he has ten dollars; and he wouldn't offer me a cent of it."

"Where did he get ten dollars?" asked Mr. Graves, in surprise.

"I don't know. I expect it must have been some he had left that the old man gave him. He

bought some grub and a pick-ax and a spade, and left them there so that I could go and get them this morning; and that set the storekeeper to going. He warned me not to let the ghosts catch me—"

"Oh, my soul!" exclaimed S'manthy, raising her hands toward the rafters again. "Have they got ghosts up there?"

"You just bet they have," answered Peleg, trembling all over. "But Nat didn't seem afraid of them at all."

Mr. Graves leaned back against the post near which he was sitting, stretched his legs out straight before him and looked fixedly at the ground. He had never heard of ghosts being in the woods, and this made him wonder if he would dare go after the cows when they failed to come up.

"I don't think you had better go back there any more, Peleg," said he, when he had taken time to think the matter over.

"You may just bet I won't go back. I have not got use for a boy who will talk to them in

language I cannot understand. And worse than that, he led the way to old man Nickerson's farm by the back way, through bushes that grew thicker'n the hair on a dog's back, and he wanted me to come back the same way. Mighty clear of me!"

"I reckon we had best go and let Jonas know about this," said Mr. Graves, after thinking once more upon the matter.

"Well, you can go and I will stay here and get something to eat," said Peleg. "He will find Nat within a few rods of the old man's house. Dog-gone such luck! Why couldn't the old man have left his money out in plain sight so that a fellow could get it?"

"Did you see any of the ghosts?" said his mother, in a low tone.

"No, I didn't, and I kept a close watch for them, too. You see Nat says they don't come around until at night. I wonder if there is anything left of that boy up there?"

"I hope to goodness that they have cleaned him out entirely," said Mr. Graves, angrily.

"If we can't have any of that money I don't want him to have it, either. Now you go in and take a bite, and I will make up my mind what we are going to do."

"Are you waiting for me to go up to Jonas's house with you?"

"Yes, I reckon you had better. You have been up there and saw how the matter stands, and you can tell him better than I can."

"I am mighty glad he won't ask me to go back to old man Nickerson's woods with him," whispered Peleg, as he followed his mother into the house. "I wouldn't stir a peg to please anybody."

"What do ghosts look like, Peleg?" asked S'manthy, as she brought out a plate of cold bread and meat and set them on the table before the boy. "I have often heard of them but I never saw them."

"Don't ask me. I looked everywhere for them, but they would not show up. I'll bet Nat can tell by this time how they look—that is

if he did not get scared at them like myself and run away."

By the time that Peleg had satisfied his appetite Mr. Graves had thought over the situation and determined upon his course. He would not go near Mr. Nickerson's farm—he was as close to it as he wanted to be; but he would go up and tell Jonas what Peleg had seen. Jonas was a good fellow, and perhaps he would do as much for him under the same circumstances. If Jonas and Caleb thought enough of the money that was hidden there to go up and face the ghosts, that was their lookout and not his.

"You had your gun, Peleg," said Mr. Graves, when the boy came out the door and put on his hat. "Why didn't you depend upon that?"

"Course I had my gun; but it was not loaded. I declare, I never once thought of that old single barrel."

"If one of them had seen that gun in your hands—"

"Shaw! I ain't thinking of that. I ran

away so quick that I left it behind. Maybe Nat used it last night."

"But you say he aint' afraid of them," suggested his father. "What should he want to use your gun for?"

"Of course he ain't afraid of them in the day-time; but when it comes down dark night in the woods, and you hear the bushes rattling and something go g-g-r-r—"

"Oh, Peleg, stop!" ejaculated his mother, who was all in a tremble.

"Stop your noise, Peleg," said Mr. Graves, who could not bear to hear him imitate the ghosts in this way. "Maybe they don't go that way at all."

"Well, if you want to find out, you had best go up there and stay all night," said Peleg, shaking his head in a wise manner. "And I will tell you another thing that happened while I was up there. Nat told me that I must not be frightened, for when he got onto the trail of those papers again——"

"Did he lose the trail of them?" asked Mr. Graves.

"I reckon so; for he looked up into a tree and said: 'Here I am and there I am,' and the tree showed him which way to go."

"Aw! Get out," exclaimed Mr. Graves. "Could a tree speak to him or point with its branches to tell him when he was going wrong?"

"That tree did as sure as you live," said Peleg confidently.

"Did you see it?' '

"Yes sir, I did. That tree was standing like any other tree, with its branches pointing upward, and when he said those words of his, one of the limbs pointed out so," said Peleg, indicating the movement with his finger.

Mr. Graves looked rather hard at Peleg, as if he did not know whether to believe the statement or not, and the boy met his gaze without flinching. When Peleg told a lie he generally looked down at the ground.

"Well, go on. What did you see next?"

"Well, sir, when we got a little further he

said I would hear something pretty soon, and it would make me wish that I had never been born. I tell you I did hear it, and—Oh, my soul! How can I ever tell it!"

"What did it sound like, Peleg?" asked his mother.

"A dead tree was standing a short distance away and when Nat went on with his words: 'Here I am and there I am,' one of the branches on that tree let go all holds and came down to the ground with a crash and broke all to pieces. I certainly thought I was going with it, too."

For the first time that day Mr. Graves uttered an exclamation of disgust, turned on his heel and went into the house for his rifle.

"You can hear those sounds right here on the place," remarked his mother. "That's nothing new."

"The little fule!" exclaimed Mr. Graves, who just then came out again with his rifle. "You got so frightened with the ghosts that you don't know the signs of falling weather when you hear them. It is going to rain very shortly."

"Well, I just want you to go up there if you dare," said Peleg, somewhat taken aback by this explanation of the phenomenon which had frightened him. "Here you are, making all sorts of fun at my ghost stories, and you have gone and got your rifle to protect you. Leave that at home if you are not afraid to go up to Jonas's house without it."

"No, I reckon I will just take it along. What you have said about the ghosts may be true; but I don't believe in such things as the trees and bushes telling him where to go. Come on now, and we'll go up and see Jonas."

"And are you going to leave me here all alone?" inquired Mrs. Graves, who went into the house for a shawl to throw over her head. "I'm going, too."

"Now, S'manthy," began her husband.

"I know all about it; but I ain't a going to stay here all by myself after such talk as we have had," said the woman, determinedly. "I have some business with Jonas's wife as much as you have with him."

Mr. Graves said no more. He probably knew how an argument would come out with his wife. He cast apprehensive glances at the bushes as he walked along, and seemed to be much occupied with his own thoughts. The money was there, there could be no mistake about that, and he had intended to go up there that very day so as to be on hand in case Peleg needed assistance; but the boy's returning home with such a story had put new ideas into his head. Taking into consideration the way he felt now he would not have gone a step toward Mr. Nickerson's woods if he knew the foot of every tree in them had a gold mine buried beneath it which he could have for the digging. He fully credited the tales about the ghosts; the rest of it he did not put any faith in.

"That's the end of my dreams," he muttered, as he walked along. "I say as Peleg did, dog-gone such luck! If the old man had left his money out where we could find it, well and good; but, as it stands, I have got to be a poor man all my life."

In due time they arrived at Jonas's house where they found his wife engaged in getting breakfast while her husband, with Caleb to help him, was engaged down to the barn. Mrs. Graves stopped in the house, which she speedily turned upside down with her stories, while Mr. Graves kept on and found Jonas sitting on an inverted bucket, meditatively chewing a piece of straw, and Caleb walking around with his hands in his pockets. They had been discussing Nat's absence, but they could not come to any determination about it. Nat was gone, it was money took him away and how were they going to work to cheat him out of it?

"Howdy," said Jonas, who, upon looking up, discovered Mr. Graves approaching. "Have you started out bright and early this morning to go hunting?"

"Well-no," replied Mr. Graves, taking his rifle from his shoulder. "I did not know but I might see a squirrel or two bobbing around. Seen anything of Nat lately?"

"No, I have not. Do you know what has become of him?"

"You're right I do. He is up to old man Nickerson's woods."

"There now. We always allowed that he had gone up there. Has he got onto the trail of any money?"

"He has, but that's all the good it will do him. Peleg has been up there with him."

Jonas simply nodded his head as if to say that he knew as much long ago. He learned it when he went to Mr. Graves' house to inquire about Nat.

"But it won't do him any good, getting on the trail of that money won't," continued Mr. Graves. "There are ghosts up in those woods."

"Ghosts!" exclaimed Jonas and Caleb in a breath. They looked hard at Mr. Graves and then they looked at Peleg. The boy simply nodded to show that his father was right.

"Did you see any of them?" asked Caleb, who was in a fair way of being frightened.

"Naw; I didn't see any of them nor hear

them. I didn't stay long enough for that. I took my foot in my hand and came home."

"Peleg has a long story to tell, and I thought you would rather hear it from him than anybody else, so I brought him along."

As this was the introduction to Peleg's story those who were standing up found places to sit down, and waited impatiently for him to begin.

CHAPTER XI.

Nat's Fortune.

"WELL, sir, I have slept all night in these woods alone and there has no ghost been near to warn me that I had better quit my search and go home," said Nat, sitting up on his bed of boughs and rubbing his eyes. "I reckon the ghosts all exist in that storekeeper's imagination. Now I must take a good look at that rock again, eat some crackers and cheese and go down after that spade and pick-ax. By this time tomorrow I shall be a rich man."

Nat had often wondered how much there was of that money that was hidden away, and he was always obliged to confess that he did not know. The neighbors all insisted that old man Nickerson was "powerful rich," and acting upon this supposition he thought that about $5,000

would amply repay him for all his trouble. That would get him a nice education, and that was all that Nat asked for. He could then take care of himself.

Nat sprang off his bed, performed the hasty operation of washing his hands and face in the brook, and not having any towel to wipe upon, went up the bank toward the stone, shaking the water off his hands as he went. The rock was all there; he was certain on that point. If he had that spade and pick-ax in his hands he would soon know how much he was worth. The only trouble with him now was, to dig it up, reach St. Louis with it in some way or other and put it in the bank. Once there he would like to see Jonas and Caleb get their hands upon it.

The next thing was breakfast, and that was very soon dispatched, and then he tried to make himself a little more respectable to the persons who met him on the way by brushing off his clothes and bringing some pins into play to hide his rents. Then he stood up and looked at himself.

"They will show anyway, I don't care how I pin them," said Nat, at length. "Well, what's the odds? Everyone knows how I lived there under that man's roof, and I can't be expected to look any better. Maybe I will look as well as the best of them one of these days."

Nat's first care was to hide Peleg's gun and ammunition for fear that some one might come along and appropriate them to his own use. The whole thing was not worth two dollars, but still that would be something for Peleg to lose. He would go frantic if he found that the gun had been stolen. This done he was ready to leave his camp and he took the near way through the bushes; and when they had closed up behind him he could not help thinking how frightened Peleg was when he came through there. He neither saw nor heard anything alarming, and in a short time he climbed the fence and was out in the road. As luck would have it a team was going by, and the man pulled up his horses and offered him a ride.

"Going fur?" said he. "Well jump in."

"Thank you," said Nat. "It's about six miles to Manchester, and I believe it is cheaper riding than walking."

"What are you doing down there in old man Nickerson's?" asked the man. "Ain't you the boy that lives with old man Keeler? I hear that old man Nickerson is dead."

"Yes sir. He just died a few days ago."

"Well, how much did he leave old man Jonas's wife? I hear he was powerful rich."

"I don't know how much he was worth, but I don't believe he left anything."

"Now that is mighty mean of him. He has some money somewhere, and the man what finds it is rich as Julius Caesar."

"I thought he must be worth $5,000 dollars," said Nat.

"Oh, my! Say $15,000 or $20,000, and you will just about hit it. You see some fellows living around here think that the rebels got it, but the old man was too sharp for them. Then they got mad and burned his house and left him out in

the cold; and then Jonas took him in. Did he leave Jonas anything?"

"No, I am quite sure he did not. Are there any ghosts down here in the woods?"

"Naw. There are some fellows who have been up here a time or two, and when they came back they told wonderful stories of what they had seen back there in the timber. But there is nothing to it."

Nat became silent after this and so did the man He began to be real uneasy now, for there was a difference in the sum the old man had left behind him. He drew a long breath every time he thought of the wide gulf there was between $5,000 and $15,000 or $20,000, so much so that the driver looked at him in surprise; but he had nothing to say for which Nat was very thankful. In due time they arrived at Manchester, and Nat, after thanking the man once more for his kindness, sprang from the wagon and went into the store.

"Well, sir, I declare, if one of them boys hasn't come back," said the storekeeper, hurry-

ing forward to shake hands with Nat. "Did you see any of them ghosts and what did they say to you?"

"I did not see one," said Nat, with a smile. "I guess last night was not their night to come out. Have you got my things handy?"

"Yes sir. They are right up here where I put them. But what has become of your pardner?"

"You scared him out."

"Do you mean that he has run away? Well, I am sorry for that," said the storekeeper, on receiving an affirmative nod from Nat.

"I am not sorry for it," said Nat to himself. "It gave me just the chance I was waiting for—to dig without his knowing it."

Without waiting for the man to ask him any more questions Nat picked up the things he had left behind, including the pick-ax and spade, and turned to go out when the storekeeper evidently wanted some other matters settled.

"You said yesterday that you were going up to them woods to look for timber," said he.

"Now what do you want to do with those things?" he went on, pointing to the spade and pick-ax.

"There are some other things we wanted to fix," said Nat, without an instant's hesitation. "We are going to put in some crops there, and we want to repair the old man's fence which has become torn down during the war."

"Oh!" said the man, staring rather hard at Nat. "You will need an ax, then."

"That reminds me. I came pretty near forgetting it."

Nat laid down his bundles again and the man turned to get the implement he had spoken of, and while he was getting it down he kept his eyes fastened on Nat's face. But he said nothing more and saw him take his purchases and leave the store.

"Now maybe that story will do and maybe it won't," said the man, as he came out from behind the counter and watched Nat going along the street. "There is something else that you

want to dig for. I wonder if it is the old man's money?"

"They say that he had sights and gobs of it when he buried it to keep it out of the hands of the rebels," said a man who was seated in the back part of the store, and who now came up to listen to what the storekeeper had to say. "But the rebels didn't get none of it. He hid it where they couldn't find it."

"They say he is living up to Jonas Keeler's," said the first.

"Old man Nickerson is dead. He has been dead two or three days. It is a wonder you had not heard of it.' '

"Well, sir, that boy is going to dig for the money," said the storekeeper, doubling up his huge fist and bringing it down upon the counter. "Now what be we going to do about it?"

"I don't know of any other way than for me and you to go up there and watch him while he digs for it," said the customer, in a whisper. "When he gets it dug up, we'll just take it."

"And what will the boy do?" asked the storekeeper.

"Oh, we can easy fool him. Let us play ghosts."

That was something new to the storekeeper. He drew nearer to his customer and the two whispered long and earnestly. At length they seemed to agree upon a plan, for the customer went out and the storekeeper went back to his place behind the counter.

"I let that fellow talk too much," said Nat, as he walked hurriedly away with his bundles in his arms. "He knows that I want to dig in the ground, or else I wouldn't have called for these things. I must get back to my camp and go to work as soon as possible, or else I shall have some one else on my back."

Nat was now harassed by another fear and to save his life he could not shake it off That storekeeper at Manchester knew there was no such thing as ghosts in the woods, he knew that Peleg had been frightened away by the bare mention of such objects as might be around in the

event of their search proving successful, and how did he know but that the storekeeper and some one like him, might take it into their heads to come up and look into the matter. He was now more afraid of those men than he was of Jonas and Caleb.

"I tell you it all depends upon getting my work done quick," said Nat, turning about and looking at the store. "That storekeeper will come up there for fifteen or twenty—By gracious! I wish I had that money dug up now."

The longer Nat dwelt upon the matter the greater haste seemed necessary and the longer the distance was to the Nickerson woods. He broke into a dog trot before he was fairly out of sight of the city, and by the time he climbed the fence that threaded the bushes he was nearly exhausted. Everything there was just as he left it; but so out of breath was Nat that he threw himself on his bed of boughs and heartily wished he possessed the strength of a dozen men. At length he sprang up and went to work. He must do something or else see his fortune slip through

his grasp. He cut the lever with which to move the rock, trimmed it off neatly and catching up his pick-ax and spade he jumped across the brook and made his way up the hill. Hastily clearing away the bushes that had grown up around the rock he thrust his lever under one side of it, got under the other end, and to his surprise the rock moved with scarcely an effort on his part.

"Hail Columbia happy land!" gasped Nat, as he eased up for a moment on the lever and surged upon it to obtain a new hold upon the rock. "The thing moves, and that proves that it has been pried out of its bed before. Come out here and let us see what's under you."

The rock was heavier than Nat thought it was, but by dint of sheer hard work he finally succeeded in getting it out of its bed and moved away so that he could use his spade. To have seen him go about his work one would have thought he had an all day's job before him and that he was to ask for his pay when his work was done. Although his face was very white and his

hands trembled, he took a spadeful of earth before he threw it out, and once, when he saw the perspiration gathering upon him, he stopped, took off his hat and wiped his forehead ere he set in again.

"I just know there is something here, but I will take it easy and by the time I strike the money—but perhaps it isn't money at all," murmured Nat, pausing in his exertions to see how much he had accomplished. "Whatever there is, it has got to come out."

Before Nat got down as far as he wanted to go he came to the conclusion that Mr. Nickerson must have thought that he had plenty of time at his disposal, for he dug down at least two feet before he struck anything. But the earth was soft, in all these years it had not become packed at all, and that showed that there had been somebody there before him. At length his spade hit something hard—something which he could not remove. He dug down by the side of it and then found that it was a board which completely filled up the space. To get the dirt off of the

rest of the board was comparatively easy, and then Nat threw out his spade, stepped to one side and placed his hands under it. The sight that met his gaze was enough to deprive him of the little strength he had left. The space below him was literally filled up with bags—small bags, to be sure, but one of them was so heavy that when Nat came to lift it from its place and put it out of the hole so that he could examine it, he found that handling it was quite as much as he wanted to do.

"Hail Columbia happy land!" said Nat again. "I am in luck for once in my life. There is more than $5,000 in that bag."

Nat followed the bag out of the hole, carefully untied the string with which it was closed and he was astonished at what he saw. The bag was filled with gold pieces, twenties and tens and fives down to ones. That one bag alone must have contained almost the sum he had named.

"Now everything depends upon my quickness," said Nat, seating himself beside the bag

and looking thoughtfully at the others. "What shall I do with them now that I have got them? I must put them somewhere else."

Nat went about this work as though he could see into the future and knew what was going to happen there in his camp in less than ten minutes. He sprang into the hole again and as fast as he could raise the bags they came out on the earth he had shoveled up. Then he came out and running into his camp seized Peleg's valise and emptied the contents upon the ground. It was better than nothing, although it would not hold more than two bags. The other one he carried under his arm and then began looking around for some place to hide them. It did not matter much where he put them so long as they could effectually hide the spot from curious eyes. At last he stopped before a huge log which had a quantity of leaves piled against it. To scrape those leaves away with his hands was an easy matter, and his bags were hastily put in, and yet there was enough for three others. They were quickly stowed away in the new place, and with

the spade Nat made everything look as natural as it did before.

The next thing was to fill up the hole and restore the rock to its bed. It seemed to him that this was a task beyond his powers but perseverance conquers all obstacles, and when it was done he threw some leaves over the earth that was scattered around, put the branches back in their place and then he was tired enough to sit down; but there was still one thing that remained to be done. The contents of Peleg's valise had to be returned, and when this was done, without any reference being made to the order in which his underwear was placed, and his spade and pick-ax had been brought under the lean-to and the ax hidden away in the bushes, Nat was ready to sit down and draw a long breath of relief.

"Hail Columbia, happy land!" said he to himself. "It is better to be born lucky than rich. There must be as much as thirty or forty thousand dollars in those bags. It is mine, Mr. Nickerson told me that he had no kith or kin

to leave it to, and I will die before I will give it up. I am quite willing that anybody should come in here and go all over the woods, and if he did not see me hide the money he will have his trouble for his pains."

While this thought was passing through his mind he heard a sudden rattling in the bushes behind him, and before he could start to his feet to see who it was, the branches parted and Jonas Keeler's forbidding face came through. The face, half hidden by thick, bushy whiskers, did not look much as it did when Nat last saw him. There was an eager expression upon it, and his hands trembled so that he could scarcely take his rifle down from his shoulder.

"Well, sir, we have found you at last," said Jonas, with a grin.

"Yes sir, you have found me at last," repeated Nat, sinking back upon his bed of boughs again.

Just at that moment the bushes parted again and Caleb came out. He seemed more eager than his father was. He looked all around to make sure

that there was no one else present, and then walked into the camp as though he had a right to.

"Thank goodness here's a gun," said he, and the tenderness with which he picked up his single barrel and looked it carefully over, would have led one to believe that it was worth money. "Did you see anything to shoot with it?"

"No," replied Nat. "The woods were perfectly quiet last night."

"Now, Nat, let us come to business at once," said Jonas setting his rifle down by the side of a tree and pushing back his sleeve. "Where is the money that you have come here to dig up?"

CHAPTER XII.

Two Brave Hunters

"GHOSTS," said Jonas Keeler, leaning his back against the side of the barn and crossing his legs. "I didn't know that there was any around here, although we used to hear and see plenty of them down in Pike County where I lived when I was a boy.

"Where did you go to find them, pap?" asked Caleb, who seemed to be deeply interested in what his father had to say.

"We didn't go anywhere to see them. They generally came to us, and they came, too, just when we didn't want to see them. We used to find them in grave-yards; and now and then they would come into our barns and houses. What did they do to you, Peleg? You need not be afraid to speak of them here, because there ain't no ghosts about."

"They didn't do anything to me," answered Peleg, "cause why, I got afraid and dug out."

Peleg had been looking for a place to sit down, and when nothing else offered he sat down on the floor of the barn and drew his feet under him. His story was a long one and immensely thrilling. He said that he and Nat did not hear anything out of the ordinary until they came to Manchester, and then the storekeeper put them on their guard. He told about the queer things he had heard while going through the bushes, and then he came to the strange words Nat had used—"Here I am and there I am" until Jonas began to look wild. But when he came to the tree on the hillside which dropped its boughs when Nat called upon him, Jonas's face, which had thus far betrayed the deepest interest, suddenly gave away to a smile, and he finally threw his head back against the barn and broke out into a violent laugh.

"Now I will tell you what's the fact; it is the truth and nothing else," stammered Peleg,

who was lost in wonder. "I saw it with my own eyes."

"No doubt you did," said Jonas, wiping his eyes to get rid of the tears that held to them. "But don't you know that that was the sign of falling weather? If you don't, you have lived in this country a good while for nothing."

"That's what I tell him," said Mr. Graves. "He has got so interested in the ghosts that he is willing to believe he sees ghosts in everything."

"Well, all I have to say is, let them that think differently go down there and stay all night," said Peleg. "I won't do it for no man's money."

"Did Nat feel afraid when you spoke of the ghosts?" asked Jonas.

"Naw. That boy ain't afraid of anything. He even called after me when I started for home to come back again, but I didn't go."

"Caleb, have you got them cows milked?" asked Jonas, getting upon his feet. "Then you had better stir your stumps and we will go in

and get some breakfast. It is after grub time now, and I begin to feel hungry."

"Well, Jonas, what are you going to do?" inquired Mr. Graves, who somehow took this as a gentle hint that he had got through with their conversation. "Are you going down there to see about that money?"

"Naw," said Jonas; whereupon Caleb, who had gathered up a milk-bucket, turned and looked at him with mouth and eyes wide open. "There ain't no money there. When Nat gets tired of looking for it, he will come back."

Mr. Graves acted as though he wanted to say something else, but Jonas picked up a fork and began tossing about the fodder and paid no further attention to him. He waited a minute or two, then motioned to Peleg, put his rifle on his shoulder and went out. Jonas continued tossing about the fodder until they were well on their way to the house, and then stood the fork up where it belonged and called to Caleb in a whisper:

"Say; do you believe all that boy said about ghosts?" said he.

"Yes. Don't you?" said Caleb in surprise.

"No, I don't. There may be some down there—I ain't disputing that; but Nat never used words to help him look for that money. Say, I am going down there."

"Oh, pap!" was all Caleb could say in reply.

"I am, and if there is money there, I will bet you he has found it."

"But, pap, you said there wasn't any there."

"Don't you see I said that just to keep old man Graves and his boy at home? Hurry up and milk them cows and I will hitch up the horse."

"Are you going with the wagon?"

"Course. It is easier to ride than it is to walk, and the first thing we know—"

"Must I go with you?" said Caleb, almost ready to drop.

"Of course you are. I can't go alone; and

think of the money we will have when we come back!"

"Well, pap, you can go and I'll stay here. It ain't safe to go. Peleg has been down there and he said he would not go again for no man's money. I've got a heap of work to do—"

"Now, Caleb, you just shut up about the work you've got to do," said Jonas angrily. "You will have to go with me and that is all about it. If Nat is not afraid of the ghosts, why should you be?"

"Yes; but you know how good Nat was to the old man when he was alive. If I had been that way, I could have gone, too."

Jonas evidently did not hear this last remark of Caleb's, for he seized the harness and went in to fix up the horse which did not look able to travel twenty miles to save his life. But then that was the way that Jonas's stock all looked. In a few minutes he had the harness on and led him out of the barn to hitch him to the wagon. It was just at this time that Mr. Graves and his party were going outside the bars and his wife

was coming down the walk to meet him. She was coming with long strides, too, as if she had something on her mind.

"Say, Jonas," said she, as soon as she was near enough to make him hear.

"Well, say it yourself," retorted Jonas. "I know all about it. I am going down to old man Nickerson's woods, me and Caleb are, and we are going to have that money. Have you anything to say against it?"

"Oh, Jonas, don't you know that there are ghosts down there?" said Mrs. Keeler, almost ready to believe that the man had taken leave of his senses to propose such a thing.

"Then that's what his wife stopped in the house for," said Jonas, and he shouted out the words so that Mr. Graves could hear them. "What does she know about ghosts? Now I heard all Peleg's story, and I listened to it as though I believed it; but if Nat is down there and can stay there all night without the ghosts troubling him, why can't other people do it, too? There ain't no ghosts there."

"Do you really think so, Jonas?"

"I know it. You see by going with the horse we'll get there in the daytime, and everybody knows that ghosts can't hurt you then. I will make him get that money and then me and you will have good times.' '

"But maybe Nat won't do it. He would be a fule to tell you where that money is hidden."

Jonas was by this time engaged in hitching one of the traces to the whiffletree of the wagon. He stopped in his work, leaned against his horse which did not seem able to bear any weight but his own, and put his hands into his pockets.

"That boy is a plumb dunce if he is going down there to find that money and then give it up to you, who didn't do the first thing toward helping him," continued Mrs. Keeler.

"What's the reason Nat won't give up the money to me?" demanded Jonas.

"Because you won't have your switch handy."

"I have my knife in my pocket, and I tell you that switches are as handy down there in the

woods as they be up here," said Jonas, once more turning to his work. "What did that old woman Graves have to say to you?"

"Oh, she told the awfulest stories of what Peleg had seen," said Mrs. Keeler, moving up to be a little closer to her husband. "She told about the heads and horns coming out of the bushes—"

"She made that all up out of her own head," interrupted Jonas, who became angry again. "Peleg did not see anything, because if he had, Nat would have become frightened, too. Now is breakfast ready? I am just crazy to be on my way to them woods. When you see us coming back, you can just take them old caliker gowns of yours and bundle them into the fire. You won't have any more use for them."

Mrs. Keeler tried to look pleased at this, but somehow or other she could not help thinking of the work Jonas would have to do before she could take those "caliker gowns" and tumble them into the fire. But she did not say any more for she knew it would be useless. She led the way toward the house to get breakfast ready, and

Jonas followed with the wagon. Caleb came along presently with the milk, and he was the most sober one in the lot. He knew better than to refuse to go with his father, for there was that switch down in the barn. It had not been brought into use since his father threatened to apply it to Nat for saying that he would not give up the shoes he had purchased, and Caleb did not want to see it brought out for his benefit.

Jonas was evidently not at ease during breakfast, for he talked incessantly about the money which he knew was there, and the way he was going to induce Nat to show it to him.

"Just let me touch that switch to him once and see how quick he will run to that place where the money is hidden," said Jonas, with an approving wink at his son. "He will go so fast that you can't see him for the dust. If he don't do it, I have another thing that will get next to him. I'll tie him up and leave him there in the woods without a bite to eat or a drop to drink, and see how long he will be in coming to his senses."

The breakfast being over there was nothing

to detain them. Caleb got up and took down his father's rifle which he closely examined. With that in his hands he was pretty sure that he could fight his way with any ghost that came in his path.

"Put a double charge of powder in there and two bullets," said Jonas. "That's the way I come it over a deer, and I will bet you if one of them ghosts gets those balls in his head—Well, he will be a dead ghost, that's all."

"You will let me carry the rifle, won't you?" said Caleb.

"No, I reckon I had best carry it myself and you do the driving," said Jonas, stretching out his hand for the weapon. "You can drive that old horse a heap faster than I can, and if I see one of those horns stuck out from the bushes—"

"Now, Jonas, don't talk that way," whined Mrs. Keeler, casting uneasy glances about the room. "There may be one of them here now."

"Naw, there ain't. There ain't no ghosts in the world. If you are ready Caleb, jump in. You will see us somewhere about sun-down."

Jonas went ahead to lower the bars so that the wagon could drive through, and then, paying no further attention to his wife, he climbed to his seat, and Caleb cracked the whip and drove off.

"Hit the old fellow and make him go faster,'" said Jonas. "We must get there by sun up, and have plenty of time to do the work besides. If we don't, we have got to come home in the dark."

This was all the encouragement that Caleb needed to make him keep up a tremendous beating of the horse all the way to Manchester. The horse suffered and did his best, but he did not seem to carry them over the miles very rapidly; but at length, to Caleb's immense relief, the village appeared in sight. Of course the travelers were hungry and the horse needed watering, and so they drew up before the store at which Nat had purchased his things. Of course, too, the storekeeper knew them; he knew everybody within a circle of twenty miles around, and greeted them very cordially.

"Well, if there ain't Jonas," said he, brisk-

ly. "Are you going up to the woods to see how Nat is getting on? He was in here an hour or so ago, but I don't see what he got those things for. He told me that he was going to look at some timber, and he bought a pick-ax and spade. Now what is he going to do with them?"

This was the same man who had waited on Nat when he was in the store, and he was determined to find out what those digging implements were to be used for. The customer whom he had consulted, was outside attending to some necessary business and getting a team ready to go up to Mr. Nickerson's woods and find out, but he looked upon Jonas's coming as a most fortunate thing, and he hoped that by some adroit questioning he could learn something; but he soon gave it up as a bad job.

"Now the boy doesn't want a pick-ax and spade to find timber with, does he?" continued the storekeeper. "He must be going to dig in the ground with them, and I would like to know what he is after. He said he was going to repair some fences; but I did not believe it."

"Give me ten cents' worth of crackers and ten cents worth of cheese," said Jonas, who wanted to get a little time to think about this matter. "I believe we are going to have falling weather before long."

"It looks like it now," said the man, hurrying to fulfill Jonas's order. "We need rain badly. What did you say Nat wanted that spade and pick-ax for?"

"Oh yes; he is going to fix some fences, and of course he needs a spade to get the blocks in right," said Jonas, who had been doing some tremendous thinking while the storekeeper was getting out his crackers and cheese. "I am going up to look at him and see that he does his work right. Yes, the old man is dead," said he, in reply to a question. "And if I can pay the tax rates on this place I shall have it."

"Did he leave you anything?" asked the storekeeper. "I suppose that is what you are looking out for."

"I don't know why I should look for that more'n anything else," said Jonas, in a tone of

voice that showed the storekeeper that he did not care to answer any more questions on this point. "The money was his own, and he left it to whom he pleased."

Having secured his crackers and cheese and the horse having drunk all he could, Jonas and Caleb climbed into the wagon again and continued on their way. At this moment the customer drove up with a team.

"It is no go, Eph," said the storekeeper. "That's Jonas in that wagon. He did not say anything about money, but I will tell you what I think: If the old man has left any money, he has got it hidden up there in the woods. Let us wait until the boy comes down here and then go for him."

"It beats the world how everybody seems to think that the old man had left us some money," said Jonas, as plainly as a mouthful of cracker would permit. "Everyone seems to think that the old man had money, and I believe he had, too. And it all rests with Nat. If he's found it I am

going to know where it is. Hit him hard, Caleb, and make him go faster."

The six miles that lay between them and the village seemed to have lengthened out wonderfully, but the old horse finally covered the distance at last and drew up at the place where the boys had crossed the fence to enter the bushes. There had been somebody through there, that was plain; but Caleb's eyes grew wild when he looked at the dark masses of brush that lay before him; and even Jonas was not quite so lively as he had been.

"I tell you it is mighty dark in there," said the elder, getting his rifle into shape for instant shooting. "Go ahead, Caleb."

"Now I won't do it," said Caleb, seizing his father's arm and trying to push him toward the fence. "Give me the gun and I'll go."

But that gun was something that Jonas did not want to part with. He felt safe when he had that weapon, and that was more than could be said if Caleb had charge of it.

"Well, stay right close behind me and then

nobody can hurt you," said Jonas, speaking two words for himself and one for Caleb. "Don't run away. The best way to fight these ghosts is to—"

"But, pap, you say there isn't any," Caleb reminded him.

"Now I don't believe there is; but it is well to be on the safe side. Come on, now."

It was hard work for Jonas to screw up his courage to cross the fence, but he finally did it at last. As soon as he was safe in the bushes Caleb scrambled after him.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Rabbit's Foot.

JONAS and Caleb found it a hard task to work their way through those thick bushes toward the back end of Mr. Nickerson's door-yard. There had been a path in former times, but it had been used so very seldom of late that the briers and branches had grown over it until it was pretty nearly obstructed. Caleb listened for the queer sounds that Peleg had heard while going through there, but nothing attracted his attention and he began to believe that there was nothing unusual in there. Jonas worked his way ahead without saying anything, and finally pushed the last bush aside and sprang out in full view of Nat's camp. He cast his eager eyes around to see if any of the money had been dug up, but he could see nothing of it. Nat looked

just like a hunter who was enjoying a rest after a long day in the woods.

"Well, sir, we have found you at last," were the first words Jonas uttered. "Now where is the money that you have come to dig up?"

"What money?" inquired Nat, slowly rising to his feet.

"Aw! What money?" shouted Jonas, going under the lean-to, catching up Peleg's valise and shaking it to be sure that there was no money in it. "I mean that money you have come here to dig up—the money that old man Nickerson hid here during the war; the money that you have been drawing on to buy him tobacco? Where is it?"

"You have the camp and you see everything that is to be seen," said Nat. "Where the money is I don't know. Yes, I do know," he added to himself. "But I am going to keep it to myself."

"Whoo-pee!" said Jonas again. "Did you come down here for nothing? I know you didn't; and I must know where that money is and all about it, or there will be the worst whipped boy

here in these woods that you ever heard tell of. Once more and for the last time, I ask you where it is."

"You can just look around and find it for yourself," replied Nat, who, by gradually working his way around, had succeeded in getting between Jonas and the bushes. "If Mr. Nickerson left any money I don't know where it is. He would not leave it up here in the woods for it to rot all away and do nobody any good."

"No, I don't think he would do that. He thought too much of a dollar to waste it in that way; but he could leave it up here in the woods and tell you where to find it when he was through with it. Now, Nat, where is it? Tell me, honor bright, and I will give you half of it; I will, so sure as I stand here."

"You must look around and find it, for I don't know where it is," replied Nat; and the expression on his face showed that he was in earnest in his decision to keep the hiding place of the money all to himself. "If you find it you can have it all."

"I'll bet you I do, and you will go without shoes and clothes this winter," said Jonas, slipping his hand into his pocket and looking around at the trees as if he were searching for a switch. "I made you an offer and you won't take it, and now I will look for myself; but first you are going to have something to remember that offer by. What do you find there, Caleb?"

"There ain't nothing in Peleg's valise because I have looked all through it," replied Caleb. "But here is something I can't see into."

As he spoke he passed the spade over to his father, running his fingers through some dirt that still adhered to it.

"That spade has been used since it came up here, and if it could speak it would tell you something about the money," continued Caleb. "He has dug it up and hid it away in another place."

"Caleb, you are right," said Jonas, examining the spade. "Now where is it? Caleb, you just keep an eye on him while I cut a switch. I will bet you that he will tell all about it in less'n five minutes."

"I can't tell you about a thing that I don't know," said Nat.

"No; but you only think you have forgotten. A switch has a big means of starting one's intellect, and when you see that swinging over your head, you will think faster than you do now."

"Pap, I believe we are onto the track of the money at last," said Caleb, who seemed to have forgotten all about the ghosts. "Lay it onto him good fashion, and we'll go back home—by gracious! I wouldn't take ten dollars for my chance."

The words seemed to encourage Jonas, who presently pulled down a big bough and began to cut it loose. It was a large limb, larger than the one he would have taken to beat his horse with, and while he used his knife upon it, Caleb slipped around until he got on the outside of Nat, that is between him and the bushes, and stood regarding him with a smile of intense satisfaction.

"Don't hit me with that thing," said Nat, suddenly straightening up until he seemed to grow larger and stronger than Caleb had ever

seen him look before. "If you do you will always regret it."

"Oh, no, I won't hit you with it," said Jonas, with a sort of laugh that sounded more like the growl of an enraged animal. "I'll just wear you out with it unless you tell me what has been going on here and all about it. You know where that money is, and I am going to find out before I let you go. You hear me?"

There was something about Nat that did not look exactly right to Caleb. He thought that his father had undertaken a bigger job than he could accomplish by endeavoring to force the boy to tell where his money was hidden, and if he could work it some way so as to get "upon Nat's blind side" and coax him to tell what he wanted to know, why the way would be so much the easier for them. He resolved to try it, but he did not have time to try it all.

"Come now, Nat, you see how pap is going to lick you, don't you?" said he. "Now tell me where the money is and you will get off scott free.

Come now, Nat. Me and you has always been the best of friends—"

What else Caleb was going to say he did not have time to say it, that is while he was standing erect. The place on which Nat was standing was suddenly vacant, Caleb's left arm received a wrench and his foot a trip, and both of them sent him headlong into the bushes. A moment afterward Nat dashed into the bushes and was out of sight in an instant.

"By gum!" said Caleb, slowly raising himself upon his elbow and gazing in the direction Nat had taken. "Pap, he has got away."

"*Well!*" exclaimed Jonas, who being concealed from view of the boys had not seen Nat when he made his bold dash for freedom. "Has he run away?"

"Yes, sir, he has run away; and he throwed me—"

Jonas came around the tree and found that Nat was not there. He glanced all around in every direction but the boy he had hoped to try

the switch upon was somewhere else. Caleb was just crawling to his feet.

"And did you stand there and let him go?" demanded Jonas, and he half raised the switch as if he had a mind to lay it over Caleb's shoulders. "Why didn't you stop him?"

"You might as well try to stop a hurricane as to stop that fellow," said Caleb, holding one hand to his elbow. "I never saw a boy go so before."

"Well, now, catch him; catch him," shouted Jonas. "Which way did he go?"

"Out there among the bushes; and pap, I just ain't a-going in there after him. Maybe he'll get those ghosts on his side."

Jonas, who had been on the point of rushing into the bushes in pursuit of Nat, stopped when he heard those words and pulled off his hat and dashed it upon the ground at his feet. Then Caleb saw that his father was afraid of ghosts as he was himself. It was only his desire to possess the money that had induced him to come there. Caleb stood holding fast to his elbow and

waiting to see what he was going to do about it.

"Dog-gone such luck!" said Jonas.

"That's just what I say," replied Caleb. "Why did not the old man leave his money to you or mam like he had oughter do? Now nobody won't get it."

"Nobody except that miserable Nat," sputtered Jonas. "I have a good notion to use the switch on you for letting him go."

"Well, pap, you would not make anything by that. I was talking to him like a Dutch uncle, and the first thing I knew I was flat on my back, and he was just going out of sight. I did not hear anything of him from the time he struck the bushes. Do you hear him now?"

Jonas listened but all the sound he heard was the chirping of birds and the faint sough of the wind as the breeze swept through the bushes. Everything was as still as a graveyard; it seemed too still for the woods. Jonas listened for a moment and then gathered up his hat and put it on his head.

"Let's go home," whispered Caleb. "This ain't no place for us."

"That's just what I was thinking of," said Jonas, in the same cautious whisper. "Let's take everything he has got in his lean-to and dig out. We shall have to hurry because it will be dark before we reach home."

"I don't believe in taking Peleg's valise and gun back to him," observed Caleb. "He brought them out here and he can take them back."

"Well, that is so," said Jonas, who was busy picking up the spade and pick-ax and such provisions as he could find. "But in the present opportunity we want Peleg and his pap to believe that we were here. We have got a fearful story to tell when we go back, and we want them to believe us."

"That is so, too; but, pap, we won't go back through the bushes, will we?"

"Not much we won't," exclaimed Jonas, as if he were surprised at the mere mention of such a thing. "Nat's in there, and who knows but

what he has got some of the ghosts to help him along?"

"I'll bet you that is just what he did," said Caleb, dropping the armful of things which he had gathered up. "I did not hear hide nor hair of him after he got into the bushes."

Father and son were not long in picking up the things that were scattered about the lean-to (they did not find the ax because that was concealed in the bushes), and with them in their hands they beat a hasty retreat from the camp, following the course that Peleg had pursued when he was there on a former occasion. They reached the bars, stopping now and then to cast furtive glances behind them, and when they got fairly into the road their courage began to return to them.

"I will tell you just what is the matter with us," said Jonas. "We have not got a rabbit's foot between us."

"I do think in my soul that that's what's the matter," said Caleb, stopping short and looking

at his father. "Do you reckon that Nat has one of them?"

Now a rabbit's foot is something that is held in high esteem by the negroes at the South, and by some of the white people, too. Whenever you kill a rabbit, take one of the feet off and put it into your pocket; or, if you are already provided for in that respect, take the foot and give it to some one who has not got any. Thus equipped you are free from every danger. Ghosts can not disturb you, and if you have to pass a graveyard or a house that is haunted after dark, it will see you safely through. Beyond a doubt this was what was the matter with Jonas and his son. They had thought of their rabbit's feet when it was too late to be of service to them. They were kept at home on the mantle piece, snugly stowed away so that they could be seized at a moment's warning, and they had come away and never thought a word about them.

"Now did anybody ever hear of such luck?" said Jonas, in disgust. "I have a rabbit's foot and so have you; and by leaving them at home is

what has beaten us. We will go down there to-morrow or next day and see what luck we shall have."

"Do you reckon that Nat has one of them?" repeated Caleb, who was greatly relieved to know what it was that had brought them such ill luck. "Of course he had, or he never could have called upon them ghosts to help him."

"Dog-gone such luck," repeated Jonas, who kept turning this matter over in his mind. "He wouldn't go away and leave his rabbit's foot behind when he was engaged in such business, would he? I tell you I am going to keep it in my pocket wherever I go. It ain't safe to be without it."

It was a long way by the road to the place where they had left their horse, and every step of the way they looked at the bushes fearful that Nat would come out at them accompanied by one or more of the ghosts. When they reached the wagon Jonas climbed in without any words, leaving Caleb to turn the horse around, and to take care of his rifle which he hastily handed to him.

"I think I will drive going back," said he. "He is going toward home now, and perhaps I can make him step pearter than you did."

Caleb saw through his father's little trick, but he gave in to it without saying a word. He was going to have the handling of the rifle now, and he breathed a good deal easier as he clutched the weapon and seated himself on the seat beside Jonas. He did not care if Nat had three or four ghosts to back him up. He was a sure shot with a gun, and he was certain that there would be one ghost less in the country should one show himself.

The old horse stepped out wonderfully under the new driver, and it was not long before Jonas's courage all came back to him and he could talk about what happened there in Mr. Nickerson's dooryard without shouting himself hoarse.

"That there is what's the matter with us, Caleb," said he, turning on his seat and greeting him with an approving wink. "It beats the world, as long as I have lived in this country, that I did not think of that rabbit's foot before

I left home. But we will try them again some day—"

"It has got to be pretty soon too, pap," interrupted Caleb. "Nat has seen that money already. He has got it hidden somewhere else."

"I believe you are right," said Jonas, "or else how come that dirt on his spade? And to think we had to give it up just on account of not having that rabbit's foot! These little things sometimes make big changes in our affairs, Caleb?"

Caleb must have thought of this matter all the way home, but he breathed a little easier when the ancestral roof came in sight. His mother was there and she came down to the bars to lower them. As the tired old horse entered the yard she looked at Jonas, but the latter shook his head in a most discouraging manner.

"I just knew how it would be," said she.

"And just on account of leaving that rabbit's foot behind," said Caleb.

"I noticed them, and I had a good notion to holler at you and tell you to take them with you,"

said Mrs. Keeler. "But I supposed that you knew what you were doing."

None of the family said anything more until they had got to the barn and turned the horse out, and fed him with a handful of grass, and then Jonas seated himself on a bucket, which he turned upside down, and gave his wife a full history of the events that had happened to them since they went away in the morning; that is he had the groundwork of truth for its foundation, but there was many a little item which he put in that occurred to him as he went along. Whenever he touched upon anything which his wife found it hard to believe, he always appealed to Caleb, and the latter never failed to corroborate all he said.

"And do you think that he got those spirits to help him when he went into the bushes?" asked Mrs. Keeler.

"He did; else why didn't he make some noise while he was going through them?" asked Jonas, in reply. "He went along as still as a bird on the wing. It was of no use for anybody to try to fol-

low him. Well, that is once we failed, but the next time we will fight him with his own weapons. Caleb, don't you forget those two rabbits' feet the next time we go."

"You bet I won't," replied Caleb.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Storekeeper in Action.

NAT'S heart was in his mouth because he did not believe he could escape from Jonas and Caleb so easily. The noise he necessarily made in running through the bushes would naturally guide them in the pursuit, and Jonas was noted for his lightness of foot, and Caleb also, for that matter. But it was now or never. The switch was being prepared for him, and in a few minutes more he would feel the full weight of Jonas's arm; and that it would fall by all his strength, Nat did not doubt in the least.

"Here goes," said Nat, to himself. "If I fail they can't any more than whip me, and if I get away—"

Nat did not wait to finish all the sentence that was in his mind. He bounded from his

place as if he had been set upon springs, a short skirmish with Caleb who was overturned as easily as a child, and he was safe in the bushes which closed up behind him, and the twigs in his path seemed to give away before him on their own accord. He ran down the path with all the speed he could command, jumped as far to the left as he could and stretched himself out flat on the ground and waited to see what was going to happen. By the merest accident he lay down not ten feet from his camp, and consequently he was within full hearing of their voices while they remained there.

"By gum!" said Caleb, slowly, as he picked himself up from the bushes into which he had been thrown. "Pap, he has got away."

He heard Jonas when he came around the trees and knew when he raised the switch intending to use it on Caleb for not keeping guard over Nat. He listened in the hope that Caleb would feel the full force of that switch, for he had a long account against him and he did not think that any blow he could have received would have been amiss.

"He has got my shoes," said Nat to himself, and it was all that he could do to refrain from speaking the words outright. "Give him a few good licks to pay him for that."

But we know that Jonas did not use the switch upon Caleb, but talked with him about other matters. He knew when they examined the spade again to find the dirt upon it, but all thoughts that they would pursue him were turned into another channel by Caleb's request: "Let us go home. This is no place for us." But there was another fear that came over him just then. They were going home, but they intended to remove everything there was in his camp, provisions and all, and leave Nat to get along as best he could.

"Never mind; I've got my money in my hat," said Nat, pulling off the article in question and feeling of his roll of bills. "And even if he robs me, what harm will it do? I have some more money stowed away, and it is where nobody can find it."

Nat lay there in his concealment and waited

patiently for Jonas and Caleb to get through with picking up the articles they wanted to take with them and leave the camp. He knew they would not come back through the bushes, but would go across the field and so steer clear of them. He drew a long breath of relief, and finally raised himself upon his knees as they passed out of the ravine, but still he did not think it wise to show himself until the creaking of wheels, loudly proclaiming their need of wagon grease, was heard, slowly at first, then increasing in volume as the horse responded to the whip, and when it had died away entirely he got upon his feet and made his way back to the camp. Everything that could have been of use to him had disappeared.

"Now the next thing will be something else and what shall it be?" said Nat, throwing himself upon his bed of boughs and turning the matter over in his mind. "I can't live without something to eat—that is plain enough to be seen; and I don't know about going down to Manchester for more grub. Of course somebody there saw Jonas when he came through, and what kind of an ex-

cuse will I make for coming back there after more provisions? I have told so many lies lately that I want to keep out of it now, if I can."

For ten minutes Nat laid there trying to make up his mind what to do, and then got up prepared for action. He wanted to see where he had left his money, and then he would go on to Manchester and be governed by circumstances. If Jonas had not stopped there to converse upon his object of going to old man Nickerson's fields, well and good. He would purchase some new clothes, the first he had ever owned, enough crackers and cheese to last him on his way to St. Louis, come back to his camp after dark, secure his money, and then the place which had known him so long would know him no more forever. When he was away among strangers and nobody knew who he was, he would be ready to begin his life over again.

"That is what I will do," said Nat, wending his way up the hill. "My first thing must be to get some new clothes, or when I come to put that money in the bank they will think right away that

I have stolen it, and there will be more trouble for me. I should not dare to send for anyone here to prove who I am, for they would turn me out the biggest rascal upon earth, so that they could get the money; so what should I do? By George! I am not out of trouble yet."

In a few minutes Nat arrived beside the log under which he had buried Mr. Nickerson's money, or rather he called it his own money now, and everything looked just as it did when he left there. No one had been near it. He threw some more bushes over the place, kicked some leaves around it and then set out for Manchester. He felt his responsibility and it is not right to say that he carried a light heart beneath his jacket, for he did not. He began to see that there was a big difference in wishing for money and having it. He found that it was some trouble to take care of his treasure.

He shortly reached the road near the spot where Jonas and Caleb had left their horse, but there was no one in sight. He climbed over the fence and kept on his way, looking neither to the

right hand nor the left, so impatient was he to reach his journey's end, and finally he stood in the store where he had been several times before; but he did not know what those two men in the back part of the store were talking about. They looked up as Nat entered, and instantly a smile overspread their faces and one of them hastened forward to greet him.

"Well, if here ain't that smart looking boy again I don't want a cent," said he, and he was so pleased to see Nat that he laughed all over. "Say, Jonas and Caleb have just been here, and I would like to know what made them leave in such a hurry. They did not see any ghosts, did they?"

"No," said Nat, in disgust. "Have you been treating them to some stories, too? They left some work to do back at home, and went there to attend to it. You scared one fellow out but you can't scare me out."

"I never was so sorry for anything in my life," said the man. "I saw that Peleg could be

easily frightened, and so I started that ghost story on him."

"Have you got anything to eat in the store?" asked Nat, who did not want to talk about the ghosts any more. "They took away all the provisions I had."

"Of course we have," said the man briskly. "What do you want? Say. Did you find that money you were looking for?"

"What money?" asked Nat, in surprise.

"Oh, come Nat, there is no use of your trying to play off on us in that style," said the storekeeper; and there was just a shade that darkened his brow as if he were getting angry. "You went up there to dig up some money, didn't you, now?"

"I wish you would give me those provisions and let me go along back," said Nat, who did not much like the way the man eyed him. "I don't know anything about any money."

"See here, Nat," whispered the man, putting his face close to the boy's ear and holding his arm, "if you will tell me where that money is—"

"I tell you I don't know anything about it," declared Nat, pulling away from the man's grasp. "If you don't want to sell me some grub, I will go elsewhere."

"Come with me; I want to see you," whispered the storekeeper, retaining his hold upon Nat's arm and drawing him toward a side door.

"Say what you have got to say right here," said Nat. "There is no secret about it. I dug up no money while I was there, and I don't care who knows it."

"But I don't want that everybody should know what I am going to say to you," urged the man; and as if to add emphasis to his words he seized the boy with both hands, fairly lifted him from the floor, carried him through the side door which closed behind him. "Now will you listen to what I have to say to you?" he added, with a wicked glitter in his eye. "I have got you now, and here you are going to stay as long as I want you."

At this moment the door opened and the customer came in. He, too, was in the plot, if such

it could be called, for he evinced no surprise at what he saw.

"Is the way all clear?" asked the storekeeper.

"Yes; there is no one on the streets," replied the customer. "Now what be you going to do with him?"

"We'll take him back in the storeroom and shut him up there," was the answer. "What do you think of that, my boy? There you will wait until you are ready to reply to such questions as I ask you, with a big bull dog to keep an eye on you. If you try to get out there won't be anything left of you in the morning."

While the man was talking in this way he was dragging rather than leading Nat toward the back part of the store, and at last halted in front of a door where he released him, and began searching in his pockets to find the key. It was dark in there, owing to the fact that there were no windows to let in light upon the scene, and when he found the key and inserted it into the lock, a growl followed by a deep-toned bark came

from the inside. The animal that uttered it must have been fierce; that was easy enough to be seen.

"Now you see what you'll get if you try to get away," said the storekeeper, throwing open the door. "I reckon you will think twice before you come any of your tricks on Benny; hey, old dog."

Nat's heart seemed to stop beating. If there was anything in the world that he was afraid of it was a savage dog. He looked at Benny, and rightly concluded that "he would not come any of his tricks" on that beast. He was the worst looking dog that Nat had ever seen. He was small, but he had an immense head, and his under jaw stuck out so that his teeth could be plainly seen. He was yellow all over except his head, which was as black as if he had been painted, and he was bob-tailed. He did not appear to be gratified by this intrusion at all. He would hardly get out of his way when the man pushed him aside and pointed to a box and told Nat to sit down there.

"I tell you I don't know anything about that money," said Nat, who was quite alarmed at the idea of being shut in that room over night with such a dog for a companion. "I will go up there with you and help you dig for it; that is if you think it is in the ground."

"Of course we know it is in the ground or else you wouldn't need a spade and pick-ax to throw it out with," answered the storekeeper. "You tell us where it is, and let us go up and dig for it."

"I can't tell you for I don't know;" said Nat.

"Very well; then you can stay here until you find out," said the man, fiercely. "When you get so hungry and thirsty that you can't stand it any longer, you just yell and I will be around. Will you tell us?"

"I have already answered your question until I am tired of it," said Nat, seating himself on the box, with a determined look on his face. "If I stay here until I die you won't get anything else out of me."

"Well, good-by," said the man, moving toward the door. "We are going up right now to look for it, and when we come back, perhaps we will tell you how much we have made. Watch him, Benny. Keep an eye on him, and if he goes near that window, just take him down and serve him the way you did that burglar that got into the store last week."

With this parting advice to his dog the storekeeper went out followed by his customer, and Nat heard the key as it grated harshly in the lock. He sat perfectly still, he was afraid to do otherwise, for, now that his eyes became somewhat accustomed to the darkness, he could see that the dog kept his position beside the door, and seemed to be awaiting some move on his part. Once or twice he licked his huge jaw as if he were tired of waiting.

"Well, sir, I am in for it now," said Nat, running his eye along the wall as if he were looking for that window of which the storekeeper had spoken. 'I would not be safer if I were shut up

in jail. That dog—Whew! I don't want anything to do with him."

The dog evidently knew what opinion Nat cherished toward him, for after waiting in vain for him to make some advances, he came over to Nat and laid his chin upon his knee. Nat could hardly keep from yelling when he saw the dog advancing toward him, but when he reached the boy and worked his nose as if he were trying to place his hand upon his head, his heart gave a thrill of delight.

"Well, by gum!" said Nat, unconsciously making use of the same expression that Caleb had used when Nat threw him headlong into the bushes. "I believe the dog is friendly;" and he raised his hand and placed it on the dog's head.

Nat had never been more astonished in his life. The dog's appearance was against him; but that was as far as it went. He was a good, honest dog in reality, and seemed to sympathize with Nat in his trouble.

"Benny, good Benny; I believe you are a good dog yet," said Nat, reaching down and pat-

ting the animal on the side. Benny not only submitted to it, but when he saw that Nat was about to stop he worked his nose again as if he meant him to continue. "I believe now that I will try that window," said Nat, a bright idea striking him. "Since Benny is all right if I sit here, he will be all right if I move around."

Nat had by this time located the window, and he arose from his box and moved toward it as though he had a perfect right there. Benny moved with him, and did not raise any objections when Nat seized the staple with which the window was fastened and exerted his strength to open it. It was a heavy window, and was doubtless used for passing in and out bulky goods that would take up too much room in the store; but it yielded to Nat's muscle at last, and by pushing it open a little way he let a flood of light into his prison and could also see what there was outside. He found that the opening gave entrance into a kind of stable yard, bounded by a shed on one side, and by pushing it open a little more, he saw that on the other side it ran down to the street.

His escape was now only the question of a few minutes had he cared to leave at this time.

"Glory!" whispered Nat, closing and fastening the shutter and stooping down to caress Benny. "I dare not try it now, for fear that that storekeeper may be on the watch; but when it comes dark, we won't stay in this house any longer. Hail! Columbia happy land!"

Nat now felt at ease. He pulled off his hat, felt of his roll of bills and then began to pat the dog and talk to him. He had certainly determined on one thing and that was to take the dog with him. He had some money, how much he did not know, and it would be the source of immense relief to him to know that he had someone whose looks would help him through.

"I will bet that there won't be anybody pitch into me to see what I have got with me, if he only takes one look at you," said Nat, stroking the dog's head. "I never had a dog take up with me this way before. I tell you, Benny, you came in just right."

It must have been two o'clock by the time

Nat was shut up in that room, so he had six or seven hours of waiting to go through before the storekeeper would come around again to see how he felt over telling him where he had left that money. There was one thing about it: He would not tell him; he would die first. He kept repeating this resolution over and over again until the sun went down, and it began to grow so dark in his prison that he could not see his hand before him. An hour passed, and then a key rattled in the lock, the dog gave one of his tremendous barks and took his stand in front of the door, which presently opened admitting somebody, it was so dark that he could not see a single feature on him. But it was the storekeeper. He knew him as soon as he spoke.

CHAPTER XV.

Nat Wood, Gentleman.

"HI there!" exclaimed the storekeeper, as he threw open the door and stepped over threshold. "Keeping watch over him yet, ain't you, Benny? I told you it wouldn't be safe for you to try to get away. Yes, here's some supper for you, Benny. Nat can't have any until he gets ready to talk to me. How do you come on, Nat?"

"About as comfortably as I can, kept here in the dark and with a savage dog for a companion," said Nat. "I wish you would take me out where it is a little lighter."

"I could not possibly think of it," said the man, with a laugh. "You think you are smart, don't you? We know where that money was hidden, and we have been up there and got it."

It was lucky for Nat that the storekeeper had come in there without a light, for the way these words were spoken fairly took his breath away. This was something that he had not bargained for. He settled back on his box trying to find something to lean against, and could not say anything to save his life.

"What do you say to that, my boy?" asked the man. "You did not know that we could find that money without asking you, did you?"

"Where—where did you find it?" stammered Nat, suppressing his excitement, and it was all he could do to utter the words.

"Oh, we found it under a tree where the old man had left it," said the storekeeper, carelessly. "I tell you he must have gone down deep, for we dug a trench there that was as deep as we were."

Nat straightened up again and drew a long breath. If the storekeeper told the truth, he had not yet found the money. He had not dug in the place where it was concealed in the first instance,

because he did not say anything about the stone which needed a lever to pry it out of its bed.

"Well, you have done more than I could do," said he, after thinking a moment. "You have the money—How much did you get?"

"Oh, about fifteen or twenty thousand dollars," replied the man. "We were in such a hurry that we didn't stop to count it. But we have enough to keep us without work as long as we live."

"Now what is to hinder you from turning me loose?" asked Nat. "I can't do you any more good by staying here."

"I forgot to speak about that to my pardner," said the man, who was taken all aback by this proposition. "And he has gone away and I shan't see him for a week."

"And are you going to keep me here all that time?"

"We might as well. You see we don't want you to go up and tell Jonas and Caleb about this thing, for they might make us trouble."

"I'll promise you that I shall not go near

Jonas and Caleb. I want to get as far away from Manchester as I can. You might give me something to eat, any way."

"Well, I will see what my pardner says about it. If you keep still—"

"Why, your partner has gone away," said Nat.

"I mean when he comes back. It won't take you long to stay here a week. Now if you keep still—"

"Are you going to keep me a whole week without anything to eat?" asked Nat, in surprise. "I can't possibly live as long as that."

"Maybe my pardner has not gone yet, and I can speak to him. Now if you keep still, that dog would not pester you; but if you get up and go to roaming around, he'll pin you. Then you won't tell me where the money is—humph!"

This was another evidence that the man had not been near the place where the money was supposed to be hidden. He came pretty near letting the cat out of the bag that time. Nat did not say

a word in reply. He wanted the man to believe that he put faith in his story.

"Well, good-by. I shall not be in here before to-morrow morning; and if you have anything to say to me—"

"What have I got to say? You have found the money, and what more do you want?"

The man muttered something under his breath that sounded a good deal like an oath by the time it got to Nat's ears, turned on his heel and walked out, slamming the door after him. Nat waited until the sound of his footsteps had died away, then threw himself back on his box and laughed silently to himself.

"If everybody is as big a fraud as that man, my money is safe," said he, rubbing his hands together. "He has found the money, and yet he wanted me to tell him where it was. Now, Benny," placing his hand upon the dog, which just then came up and put his head upon his knee. "We will wait until twelve o'clock, and then we will start for Pond Post Office. I know it is a small place but I reckon I can get some clothes

there, and a couple of big valises that I can carry my money in."

The time now seemed longer to Nat than it did before. He felt at his ease, and he longed to be up and doing. Every minute that he lingered in his prison-pen was just so much taken away from the enjoyment of his money; and he fretted and chafed over it. He wanted to get up and pace the room in order to make the time pass more rapidly away, but was checked by the thought that the storekeeper might come back there and listen at the door to see what he was doing, and thus put it out of his power to escape by the window.

"If he hears me walking about he will know that Benny and me are all right," said Nat, "and that will arouse his suspicions so that he will put me somewhere else. I reckon I had best sit down here on my box and wait for the hours to go by."

A short time afterward, perhaps it was two or three hours, he heard a faint rustling outside the door, whereupon the dog left him and took up his stand directly in front of it to see what was

going to happen. If it was the storekeeper and he wanted to know what was going on in the room, he had his trouble for his pains. Whatever it was that made the noise outside it finally ceased altogether and then everything was quiet.

This happened two or three times, and on each occasion Nat was sure that he was being watched; but every time the watcher went away without hearing or seeing anything suspicious. At last Nat heard some sounds coming from the store which indicated that the proprietor was going to shut up for the night; and then his heart began to beat more rapidly. The time for action was fast approaching. He heard the banging of shutters, the goods which had been outside for inspection during the day, were brought in and stood up beside the counter, and finally the storekeeper's tread was heard outside the door. He tried the lock and found that it was safe.

"Are you all right in there?" Nat heard him inquire.

"As tight as you please," answered Nat;

"but in half an hour more I will be down the road," he added, to himself.

"You don't know anything about that money yet, I suppose?" said the man.

"How can I know anything about it when you have got it?" asked Nat. "You have hidden it away somewhere. The best thing you can do is to take it up and clear yourself before I get out."

"You are going to make trouble for me, are you?" said the voice, angrily. "Well, if you get tired of waiting for grub just let me know. Good-by."

"Good-by. And it will be a long time before you see me again," said Nat, mentally.

Nat knew when the storekeeper went out and locked the door behind him, and then he heard him go down the street. He knew that he did not sleep in the building but his house lay at some distance from the store, so the coast was clear at last. He resolved to make the attempt at once, being satisfied if he were well on the street it would take a better man than the storekeeper to overhaul him. It was but the work of a few sec-

onds to go to the window and remove the hasp with which it was confined. As the shutter swung loose he found that the moon was shining brightly and that the ten miles that lay between him and Pond Post Office could be made easily as it could by broad daylight.

"Come along, Benny," said Nat, placing both hands upon the sill and springing up so that all he had to do was to drop his legs outside. "But maybe you don't want to go."

While Nat was talking about it he was free; and he afterward said that he never felt anything so good as he did when he found the solid earth under his feet once more. The dog made three attempts to follow him, but the window was rather high and all he could do was to get his fore feet upon the sill and each time he fell back making more noise than was agreeable to Nat. The next time he tried it Nat seized him by the thin skin on the back of his neck, and in a moment more he was standing by Nat's side on the ground. We say he was standing by Nat's side; but if the truth must be told, he was prancing

around all over the ground as if he were overjoyed at finding himself at liberty once more.

"I will tell you what's the matter with you," said Nat, after he had looked carefully around him and had drawn a bee-line for the bars that led him out into the street. "You have been shut up and deprived of your freedom so long that you don't know what to do with yourself when you are let out. Well, you stick to me and I will see that you are not shut up any more."

Nat's first impulse, when he found himself outside the bars, was to strike up a whistle; but before the first note had fairly left his lips he caught his breath and looked all around to see if there was anybody within hearing. The street was silent and deserted; but that was no sign that there was not somebody stirring in the houses by which he passed so rapidly. He felt of his roll of bills to make sure that he had it, and settled down into a good fast walk, turning his head occasionally to be certain that he was not followed. There was one thing that Nat kept saying to himself: "I have had a struggle for this fortune, and now

that it is fairly within my grasp, nobody need think that I am going to give it up. If I don't enjoy it, the money can stay there until it rots."

The next thing that Nat had to decide upon was, as he expressed it, something else. He was free but his money was not free. The way to get his fortune to St. Louis was what troubled him; and he thought about it until he arrived within sight of Pond Post Office. He began to feel sleepy, too. It was then about two o'clock, so that he had to wait for five long hours before the single store of which the village could boast would be open and ready for business. So he climbed the fence, followed by the dog, found himself a comfortable place under the protection of a beech tree and stretched himself out and prepared to go into the land of dreams. That would have been considered a hard couch by some lads who are raised in the city, but Nat had so long been accustomed to hard things that he did not mind it. He slept until the sun was well up, and his dog kept watch over him.

"Now the next thing will be something to

eat, Benny," said Nat, pausing for a while in his operations of smoothing down his hair to pat the dog on the head. "I think you could eat a good breakfast, don't you? I tell you what we will do: If they don't have anything at the store worth eating, we will go to someone's house and ask for a meal. I've got money to pay for it."

Nat's next duty was to take out his roll of bills and select enough to pay for his clothes and have a little left over for a bite to eat. When this had been done he put the balance of the roll back again, and the rest into his pocket where it would come handy. Then he climbed the fence and started for Pond Post Office again. He found very few people stirring there but the grocery-man was up, and to him Nat at once addressed himself.

"You look as though you had something to eat here," said he.

"Well, yes; that's our business," said the man, smiling upon Nat. "Gracious! What a horrid looking dog. Will he bite?"

"Not while I am around," said Nat. "Have

you got a suit of clothes? You see I need one badly enough."

"Well, I should say you did. I was looking at your clothes when you came up. How big a priced one do you want? We have some for $5.00 and some as high as $20.00."

"Let me see a sorter of betwixt and between," said Nat, as he followed the man into the store. "Something that will do to wear between here and St. Louis."

"Are you going as far as St. Louis?" asked the man, in amazement. "Then you want something pretty nice. Now there's a suit that will jest suit you."

Nat had never bought any clothes before, and consequently he was rather awkward about it. As far as he could see the clothes were well made (the man took his measure around the chest and of the length of his leg to make sure that they would fit him) the price suited him and he took them on the spot. Then he needed a couple of shirts, two pairs of stockings and a pair of shoes and a hat; all of which he took upon the man's

recommendation, and so his trading was quickly done.

"Now I wish to get a couple of valises to put them into," said Nat, looking around the store and trying to select the articles in question.

"One's going to be enough for you," said the man. "Now here is a valise—"

"That is not the kind I want," said Nat. "I want some old-fashioned carpet things, with a mouth like a catfish. You see I have lots of things to carry with me."

"Are you going to walk?" asked the storekeeper, still more amazed. "Why, it must be as much as one hundred and fifty miles."

"I don't care how far it is, I have got to go there, unless I can find some person who is kind enough to give me a lift."

"You can do that, of course; but I was just thinking that your legs will ache before you get there. Now you hold on a minute. I have two old carpet sacks in my garret that are doing no good to anybody, and if you will wait a minute I will bring them down to you."

The man went to his drawer, put away the money that Nat had given him and went out, leaving him for the next ten minutes there alone in the store. What a chance it would have been for Nat to steal something; but the thought never came into his head. He was leaning back against the counter when the man left, and that was the way he was standing when he came back.

"Those are just the things," said he, taking the carpet sacks and turning them over to see that there were no holes in them. "How much apiece for them?"

"Oh, a quarter; or, as you were raised in this country, two bits," said the storekeeper, smiling at Nat. "How do I know that you were raised in this country? I know it by your looks. I was raised in New York. Now do you want something to eat? Well, come here. I don't know whether I have anything that dog will eat or not. Where did you get that fellow? He would be just the one to guard a fellow's melon patch, wouldn't he? There, take your pick. It's my treat."

Nat knew enough about the ways of the country to know that the storekeeper was going to give him his provisions for nothing because of the dry goods he had purchased. The only things he could find were some crackers and cheese. He took enough of them as he thought to last him to Manchester and back, and then the groceryman excused himself once more and went into the back room with a huge knife in his hand. When he returned he brought with him a piece of fresh meat which he handed to the dog.

"I did some butchering yesterday, and I think that if that dog won't eat anything else, he will eat fresh meat," said he. "See him take it down."

The dog did "take it down" and devoured his meal as if he were almost starved. It was no wonder that he wanted Nat for a master when he was going to get such good living as this. He put all the things he had purchased into one of his valises, bade the proprietor good-by and took his way back toward Manchester, feeling much lighter hearted than he did when he came down.

But he did not go very far before he began looking up and down the road to see if anyone was watching him; and having satisfied his mind on this score he once more climbed the fence into the woods, and when he was safe from everybody's view he stopped and lowered his bundles to the ground.

"Now when I put these things down I am Nat, the tramp; and when I put on my other clothes, I am something else," said he, taking his suit out and unfolding it before him. "Let us see how it looks to be dressed up as a white man."

This was Nat's object in getting so far away from the road so that he could make a change in his appearance. To take off the clothes he then had on did not require a second's time, but it took more time than it did to put on the others. In fifteen minutes he was all dressed, and then he wished he had a looking glass to view himself. He certainly did look like a different person; and it is doubtful if any one who was acquainted

with him had met him on the road, if he would have recognized him. His first care was to put what remained of his roll of bills safe in his vest pocket. There were no holes in the vest for the bills to work out, and when Nat tucked them away he felt that he was somebody.

"Now I am Nat Wood, gentleman," said he, as he surveyed himself as well as he could by turning first one leg and then the other to make an estimate of himself. "I tell you it makes a fellow feel grand to be dressed up as I am. Supposing Caleb should see me now? Whoo-pe! He would not rest easy until he got these things on his own back."

Having put away his old clothing in one of the valises—it is true the clothes were old but they might be of some assistance to him some day—he took a carpet sack in each hand and kept on his way toward Manchester. The dog did not know hardly what to make of it. He looked at Nat closely for several minutes before he would

follow him, and then he seemed to think it was all right and ran on as freely as he did before.

Nat did not go through Manchester; he knew too much for that. He went ahead until he saw the roofs of the houses, and then turned out into the fields and took a round-about course to bring him to the woods back of Mr. Nickerson's yard. He was very still about it, halting every few feet to listen, and finally he stopped in a ravine where he threw his bundles off again. He was now within reach of the place where he had hidden his money. He wanted to be sure that his fortune was safe before he had anything to eat.

"Come this way, Benny; it is right out here," said Nat. "If that is gone I am gone; but I don't think there has anybody discovered it."

Nat presently stood beside the log which concealed his treasure, but this time he was not satisfied with what he saw on the outside. The leaves and twigs were there as he had left them, but that did not suit him. He looked sharply

through the woods in all directions, then kneeled down beside the log and with a few sweeps cleared away all the *debris* which he had placed there. The bags were where he had left them. He ran his hand over them and could distinctly feel the "yellow boys" with which they were filled.

"Thank goodness, it is all mine, and no one else has a right to lay a claim to any of it," said Nat, as he pushed the twigs and branches back to their place. "Mr. Nickerson gave it to me before he died, he has neither kith nor kin to say that he owns it, and now if I can find some honest lawyer in St. Louis to stand up for me, I am all right."

This was a matter that created considerable confusion in Nat's mind. He did not know where to go to find an honest lawyer, but he supposed that there must be some people who would look out for him if he only knew whom to speak to. As he had done a hundred times before he dismissed this matter with the thought that it would

be time enough to attend to that when he reached St. Louis; and he turned to go back to the ravine where to solace himself with a handful of crackers and cheese.

CHAPTER XVI.

Benny, the Tramp.

THAT was a long night to Nat Wood for, if the truth must be told, he did not once close his eyes in sleep. He had an opportunity to judge of the watchfulness of his new friend, for Benny seemed to be wide awake and never once forgot that everything depended on Nat's vigilance. He lay close beside Nat on the leaves, and once or twice he raised his head and growled at something, but nothing came near to disturb them. At the first peep of day Nat arose from his couch, he and the dog finished what was left of the crackers and cheese and then the boy went to the place where he had left his treasure and filled up his carpet sacks; and when he had them loaded he was surprised at their weight.

It did not seem possible that he could carry that gold one hundred and fifty miles.

"But I may strike a railroad before I have gone far," said Nat, drawing in a long breath and picking up a valise in each hand. "I will go as straight South as I can go, and when I become tired of my burden I can put it down and rest. I will reach St. Louis or die in the attempt."

Nat took good care to keep clear of the road until he had passed Manchester for fear that some one would see him and recognize him in spite of his new suit, and when at last he climbed the fence into the highway, he drew another long breath and went ahead with new zeal. He did not fail to look back occasionally to see if he were followed, but every time there was no one in sight, and he was more than once tempted to believe that his struggles were over; that the money was his own, and all he had to do was to hurry down to St. Louis and deposit it in the bank. But it would be a week at least, and perhaps two, before that would happen, and in the meantime he

was resolved that he would go hungry and sleepless, too, but that his treasure should be safe.

Nat wanted to buy some more crackers and cheese and feed his dog before he left the country where he was known, and with this object in view he approached the store at which he had purchased his new suit. The man was busy sweeping out, but he knew Nat in spite of the wonderful change in his appearance.

"Well, sir, you got your things, didn't you?" said he, with the smile which Nat had noticed on his face the day before. "You are off now, I suppose? But you must not try to walk all that distance. It is too far."

"I am off now," replied Nat. "But I should like to have some more crackers and cheese and a bite of fresh meat for Benny, if it is not too much trouble for you to get it."

"Of course I can. I was thinking about you yesterday after you had been in here, and there is no need that you should walk all that distance. Follow this road about twenty miles and you will strike a little village called Bridgeport. There

you will hit the Alton road, and all you have to do is to pay your fare and get on board. You have money enough for that, I suppose?"

Nat selected a couple of crackers and a liberal piece of cheese from the amount the grocer weighed out to him, saw his dog devour a huge piece of beef which had also been furnished to him, leaned against the counter to rest his tired limbs and pondered upon a thought that had just then occurred to him. He had never ridden on a railroad, he did not know what to do when he got there, but what would be done with Benny?

"But there is one thing about it," said the man, giving utterance to the thought that was in Nat's mind. "You can't take your dog with you on a passenger train."

"I have been thinking about that, and the best thing I can do is to go on foot all the way," said Nat. "I can't think of leaving Benny behind."

"Of course I don't know what rules they have with their freight trains," said the man. "Perhaps they will let you take him with you,

and perhaps they won't. You can tell when you get to Bridgeport. Good-by. I hope you will get safe through."

Nat picked up his valises again and left the store. It seemed now that Benny was a hindrance to him rather than a success, and for a minute or two he did not know but he would prefer to give him up than keep him. It did not seem possible that he could walk all the way to St. Louis and carry his treasure besides, and he looked down at Benny who gazed back at him, and wagged his tail in a forlorn sort of way as if the man had given him a bad reputation.

"No, I won't do it, Benny," said Nat, putting one of his valises on the ground long enough to pat the dog on the head. "I'll keep you with me until the time comes for you to show what you are made of; then if you fail me, I will know what to do with you."

Perhaps, when Nat came to think about it, it was better after all to keep the dog and trust to luck. There were plenty of persons who met him on the road who would have been glad to snatch

his valises and make off with them, if they only knew how much was in them; and with Benny there to protect him he did not think they would attempt it. So Benny was accepted on sufferance.

Nat had not proceeded very far on his road before he heard the sound of wheels behind him, and in a few minutes a man drove by in a lumber wagon. The man looked down at Nat and then pulled up his team.

"Soger, would you work?" said he, with a laugh. "You have a heavy load there. Are you going fur?"

"I am going down to Bridgeport," said Nat. "If you have a place for me I shall be glad to get in."

"You are as welcome as the flowers in May," said the man. "Climb in. Gosh! What an ugly looking dog you have. Will he bite?"

"He has never bitten anybody since I had him," said Nat, lifting his carpet sacks one after the other and putting them into the wagon with a

good deal of trouble. "He won't bite if he is let alone."

"Well, you just bet your bottom dollar that I won't interfere with him. What you got in there? It seems mighty heavy."

"Yes. It is some tools that I work with. Do you know anybody in Bridgeport?"

This question got the man off on a new subject, and during the ride to Bridgeport, and he went all the way so that Nat had his arms well rested by the time they got there, he never referred to the contents of the valises again. Benny ran along the wagon in front of him, and every time the man saw him he would remark on his savage appearance, and say that he did not see what a man could be thinking of to have such an ill-looking brute hanging around him. The man had been in the Confederate army, too, and during the ride he kept Nat interested in his exploits, until Nat was really surprised when he pointed to the roofs of some houses in the distance and said:

"We are near our journey's end at last.

There is Bridgeport. Did you say that you wanted to get out at the depot? Well, I am going right there."

After a few cracks with the whip and turning several corners the man drew up at a long, low building, and Nat, after thanking him for his kindness, took his valises and got out. Presently he was standing in front of an open window, on the other side of which, on a high stool, was perched a clerk who was busy smoking a cigar.

"Well, my friend, what can I do for you on this fine morning?" was the way he greeted Nat.

"I want to know what is the fare to St. Louis," said Nat.

"Eight seventy-five," said the clerk, laying down his cigar and reaching for a ticket. "Do you want to go there?"

"Yes, sir; but I want to know in the first place whether or not you will take my dog on a passenger train," said Nat.

"Where's the dog?"

"He is right here."

"Hold him up so that I can see him."

"I can't. He is too heavy."

The clerk reached for his cigar again, got down from his stool and unlocked the door leading into his room. He came out of it, but he went back in less time than it takes to tell it.

"Good Lord! Do you want to take that beast on the train?" said he. He vanished in his room on the instant and closed the door, all except a little opening through which he talked to Nat.

"No, *sir*. There is not a baggage-smasher on the road who will take charge of that dog between here and St. Louis. You must be crazy."

"Well, would they take him on a freight train?"

"*Cer*-tainly not. We want to have some men to handle the freight train when they get to St. Louis, don't we?"

"I suppose you do; but what is the reason you can't have them any way?"

"Why, that dog will eat the train men all up, if he once gets in action. No, sir. You can't take that beast on any train on this road."

"Then I don't see any way but for me to go

on foot," said Nat, who was very much disappointed.

"That's the only way that I know of, unless you will kill the dog."

"I won't do that, you bet. Does this road go straight to St. Louis?"

"As straight as a die, and that's the way," said the clerk, pointing out the direction. "I don't see what you want with that thing. The best thing you can do is to kill him."

Nat picked up his valises, walked slowly out of the other side of the depot and looked down the track. For miles it was perfectly straight, and there was not another house within sight. His arms ached awfully when he thought of the many miles of such track he would have to face during his tramp, but he never once was guilty of a traitorous thought to Benny. They were in for it, and the sooner they started in on it, the sooner it would be done.

"Now the first thing to be done, Benny, is to lay in a lot of provisions," said Nat, as if the dog could understand every word he said.

"And the next thing is to start on our way. Let us go down this way and see what we can find."

Nat had set out with the intention of finding a grocery store and a butcher shop at which to purchase his provisions, but he had not made many steps before he found one much sooner than he had expected; or rather, some thing who kept guard over it saw him coming down the street and sprang to meet him half way. It was the big dog which kept watch over the butcher stand. He saw Benny, he did not like the looks of him and proceeded to let him know it in language that anybody could understand. He came at full speed down the road, siezed Benny by the neck and rolled him over in the gutter. They were both fair sized dogs, and those who saw the movement were pretty certain that they were about to witness a good fight; but it was all over in less than two seconds, Benny seemed surprised to find himself in the gutter, turned his head to see who it was that had dared to molest him and went to work in earnest to put a stop to it. He seized his assailant by the fore-

leg, but before he had taken a fairly good hold the butcher's dog set up a fearful howl, slunk out of the fight as quickly as he could and limping on three legs, howling at every jump, he went back to his place in the butcher's shop. A moment later the butcher appeared. Nat knew that it was the butcher, for his coat was off, he had his apron on and his sleeves were rolled up.

"Now, Benny, you have got me into a terrible scrape," said Nat, reaching down to give the dog a reassuring pat. "He will want to kill you, but he will have to kill me first."

The butcher seemed to be surprised to find that his favorite had been whipped, but still he did not show it. He examined his dog and then looked up to see what had caused it; and when he saw Nat approaching he grinned all over.

"Young man, is that your dog?" said he.

Nat replied that it was.

"Well, sir, he is a nobby fellow," said the butcher; and giving no heed to Benny's savage looks he caught him by the upper jaw and raised his lips so that he could see his teeth. Then he

released his hold upon him and patted him on the side so loudly that you could have heard it across the street. "I have said that I would give twenty-five dollars for any dog that could whip Barney, and this dog has done it with just one grip. You will take that for him, won't you?"

"No, sir," replied Nat. "The dog is not for sale."

"Then I will give you twenty plus ten, which makes thirty when I went to school. Come in and get it.

"That is more than the dog is worth, but he is not for sale at any price. I need the dog more than you do. But I will tell you what I would like to have. He wants a piece of meat."

"Well, if you won't sell the dog, come in and fill him up on meat. You wouldn't look at forty dollars for that dog, would you?"

No, Nat thought that he would not sell the dog, and he went into the butcher shop and got a piece of meat that fairly made him open his eyes. He was not charged a cent for it, either.

While the butcher was examining the dog and complimenting him, Nat managed to unclose one of his valises and crowd the meat into it, and no one was the wiser for what he had done.

Of course the victory that Benny had won brought him into notice along the street, and when he went into another store to buy his crackers and cheese, he had plenty of friends to admire him. But Nat got away as soon as he could, and felt much easier when he was walking down the track toward St. Louis.

"That's a good name for you, Benny, and you will keep it as long as I have anything to do with you. Benny, the tramp. That's what you are, Benny, and you must always come when I call you."

Nat's first care was to find a place where he could sit down and satisfy his appetite without having some one to talk to him about Benny. A mile further on he found it, and there he and Benny made away with enough meat and crackers and cheese to last them until night. While there a passenger train went along, and it went

swiftly, too, as if the distance that lay between it and St. Louis was just nothing at all for it to accomplish. Nat sighed but he looked at Benny, and got up and followed after the train.

We might make this portion of our story still more interesting by telling of the wonderful scrapes that Nat and his money got into from the rough looking tramps who met him along the way and who wanted to know what was in his carpet-sacks, which he never allowed out of his grasp; but unfortunately Nat did not meet with any such adventures. It is true that one or two tramps—Nat was sure they were tramps although he had never seen one before—made some inquiries in regard to the contents of his valises, but the sight of the dog, which growled and showed his teeth every time one of them came up, induced them to be satisfied with what Nat had to say about it—that he had some tools which would be necessary to carry on his business when he got to St. Louis. He bought his food from farm houses which were scattered at intervals along the railroad, slept beside the

fence or in deserted barns every time he got the chance, and finally, when he was thinking about taking one of his gold pieces to buy him another pair of shoes, for his bills, although he had held on to them "until the eagle hollered," were all gone, he discovered, one night when the sun was about two hours high, some buildings in the distance, which were larger than any he had seen yet. By cautious inquiries at the next house at which he stopped to buy food, he learned that he was at his journey's end. How his heart thrilled with the thought! He had been more than two weeks on the way, and to say that he was tired would be hardly saying enough. In a few days his money would be safe, and then he could lie down and sleep.

"But our labor is not over yet," said Nat, as he separated the meat from the sandwiches that he had purchased and handed it to the dog. "Now is the time to look out for every person we meet. There is not one of them who would not knock me on the head to gain this money.

And yet I am to find a good, honest lawyer in all this crowd of people!"

Nat did not know how he was going to succeed, whether or not he could find what he wanted in all that crowd, but he resolved to try it at the first opportunity. Arriving at a place where a road ran across the track he turned into it, making out with much difficulty some of the signs that graced the front ends of buildings as he walked along, and finally stopped at the front of a more pretentious building than the rest, for there was a sign that struck his eye; "Lodgings 50 cents."

Nat pushed the door open and he and Benny walked in. He did not like the appearance of the room in which he found himself, but then he supposed that all hotels in the city looked like that. There was a bar in one corner of it, behind which stood a man that reminded him of Jonas Keeler as far as his appearance was concerned. On the other side of the room were tables in front of which were men playing cards, and others with men sprawling out upon them with their

heads pillowed upon their arms as if fast asleep. He thought of backing out and trying it again at another place; but the man behind the bar discovered him and came out.

"Ah! Here you are. You want a supper and some lodging, I suppose? Are you traveling far? Hello? Where did you get that dog? Will he bite?

"He has been with me a long time, and I never saw him bite anybody yet. He always sleeps with me and he won't let any one harm me. I want a bed but I don't want any supper."

"Heavens and earth! What's in your grip?" said the man lifting one from the floor where Nat had placed it.

"They are tools I work with; hammers and the like."

"Oh. You are a machinist, are you? Well, come along and I will show you to your room. I hope that dog won't nail me until I get down."

The man stepped behind the bar to obtain a key to Nat's room, and carrying the carpet-sack in one hand while Nat followed with the

other, they went through the room and up the stairs to Nat's apartment.

"There, sir, you can lock yourself in and be safe until morning. Good-night."

Nat was too tired to look around his room and see what sort of a place it was. He turned down the quilts with the remark that the sheets might have been cleaner, pulled off his clothes, and tumbled into bed; and he had hardly struck the pillow before he was sound asleep.

CHAPTER XVII.

Conclusion.

THERE was one little thing that troubled Nat, and it came to him the first thing when he opened his eyes in the morning. His bills were all gone, and he must unlock one of his valises, undo one of his bags and take out gold enough to pay the proprietor for his lodgings. There was not anything so very wrong in that, but suppose the proprietor should become suspicious and ask to see the rest of his valise; and suppose, too, that he should take it away from him?"

"It has got to be done, and I might as well have it over with," said Nat, throwing aside the quilts and jumping out on the floor. "You will stand by me, Benny, won't you?"

Nat went to his valise and opened it, and was surprised to find that one of the bags was decayed and its contents had run out. But the carpet sack had caught them and there was none of them missing. He took up a ten dollar gold piece and put it in his pocket; and then went on with his dressing with all possible speed. It was early yet and he hoped to find no one in the bar except the proprietor. He did not want any breakfast, either. It would be time enough to think about that after he had seen his money safe. The proprietor was alone in the room, engaged in washing up, but he greeted Nat with a hearty good morning.

"I want to pay for my lodging," said Nat. "My bills are all gone and so I will have to hand you that."

"W-h-e-w!" exclaimed the man, as Nat laid his piece on the counter. "You must have been living with some rich people since you were here."

The man took up the ten dollar gold piece, jingled it upon the counter to see if it was all

right, then turned to his drawer to get the money that he was to give Nat in change.

"Breakfast will be ready in a little while, lad, you had better wait," said he, at length.

Nat made some excuse, he hardly knew what, took up both his valises and left the room to run into the arms of a policeman before he got to the sidewalk. He knew it was a policeman, because he had a badge on his breast, was dressed in uniform and was swinging his club along as if waiting for a chance to use it on somebody. The police were always ready to assist friendless person, and Nat was certain that this one would assist him. He walked up to him and put his valises down by his side.

"Well, sir, what have you got there?" said he; and Nat was delighted to see him smile in a friendly sort of way.

"It is money," said Nat, sinking his voice.

"Money?" said the officer, more than half inclined to believe that the boy was crazy. "What are you going to do with it?"

"I want to get it into the bank where it will

be safe," said Nat. "You don't believe it, do you? Well, step here and I will show you."

Nat drew off on one side and the policeman, placing his club behind him, strolled slowly after him. He saw Nat unlock the valise with a smile, but when the contents of it were shown to him the smile gave away to a look of profound astonishment.

"Where did you get all this?" he asked.

"In the ground. Have you got a hotel or any place you stop at when you are asleep?"

"Hotel? No. We have a police court, if that is what you mean."

"Well, have you got any lawyers there?"

"Oh, yes; there are plenty of them there."

"I want to find a good, honest lawyer who will take charge of this money and tell me what to do with it. You see I am a stranger here."

"Yes; I saw that."

"Now can I find such a one up there?"

"Yes, of course you can, and it is the very place for you to go. I will show you where it

is. I will carry one of your carpet sacks and you can carry the other."

There were more people stirring now than there were when Nat came out of his hotel, and nearly all who passed him on the street turned too look at him with astonishment and others with amusement. They thought that Nat was being arrested for something he had done; but those who looked at his innocent face as he walked along talking to the policeman, knew better than that.

"I am so glad to be where I can tell the truth regarding this money," said Nat; and the long-drawn sigh that he uttered gave evidence to his words.

"What did you tell folks you had?' asked the officer.

"I told them that I had tools which I needed to work with when I reached St. Louis," said Nat. "And they thought I was a machinist, and did not ask any more questions. But I will tell you what is a fact: The presence of that dog

has saved me from being robbed more than once."

The policeman said he was sure of that, and at last turned to the right and led Nat up a flight of stone steps and into the court room. There were plenty of police officers standing around, but they all made room for them to pass and looked at Nat with some curiosity. The room in which the trials were held was arranged with benches and chairs, and around the outside were more chairs and to these he conducted Nat and set him down in front of a window.

"Now you keep still right here, and when the judge comes you can talk to him," said he.

"But I don't know the judge when I see him," said Nat.

"I will speak to one of those policemen there and he will tell him. I must go now."

"Why can't you stay with me?"

"Because I must go on my beat. If anybody talks to you about your money, you can say what you please. There's men enough here to protect you. So long."

There was a good deal of this talk that Nat could not understand, but he asked no questions. Everybody could see that he was a stranger there and to the city besides, and all he wanted to know now was where to go to place his money so that it would be safe. He looked at the policemen, but they did not seem to have anything to do but just to stand around and wait for somebody. They were tall, broad-shouldered fellows, and he was certain that Jonas, if he could have found his way into that court room, would think twice before laying claim to any of Nat's money. When he grew tired of looking at them he turned and looked out of the window. The people seemed to have increased in numbers, and it was a mystery where they all came from. He thought he would never get weary of looking at them, and when he turned to look at the policemen again, he found that the court room was filled; but no one paid any attention to him. A few looked at the dog, others cast glances toward the carpet-sacks, and Nat finally wondered what had become of the police justice all this time;

but while he was turning the matter over in his mind the crowd in front of the door gave way, and two gentlemen who seemed to have a right there, came in. They exchanged greetings with those they met, and presently one of them was stopped by a policeman, who seemed to be communicating something to him. Nat was certain that one of them was talking about him, for they nodded their heads in his direction, and finally the two men came toward the corner where he was sitting.

"Do you want to see me, young man?" one of them inquired.

"I want to see the judge when he comes," replied Nat. "I want to find a good, honest lawyer to tell me what to do."

"Humph!" exclaimed the man. "You want to find a good, *honest* lawyer, do you? Well, you have come to a bad shop to find him. How do you think Judge Daniels will suit you?"

"I don't know the man, for I am a stranger in a strange place; but I will talk to any man whom you recommend.

"Daniels, I guess you are in for it," said the man, turning to his companion. "This is Judge Daniels, and you may tell him what you want."

The speaker turned away and Nat proceeded to give the man who had been called Judge Daniels a good looking over. All he saw was the man's face. It was a benevolent looking face, and more than all there was a smile upon it which instantly won Nat's heart.

"What do you want to say to me?" was the way in which he began the conversation.

"I have a long story to tell, and you will have to sit down beside me while I tell it," said Nat. "In the first place, you will not steal every thing I have got, will you?"

"No, I don't think I shall do that," said the man, as he seated himself in one of the chairs alongside of Nat. "There is no necessity for it.' '

"Well, sir, it is money that I have in these two carpet-sacks," said Nat, sinking his voice to a whisper. "I have dug it out of the

ground, and carried it all the way from Bridgeport on foot."

The man continued to regard him with a smile until Nat unlocked his valise; and then he looked surprised. He listened while Nat told his story never once interrupting him, but he kept his eyes fastened upon the boy as if he meant to look him through.

"You want in the first place, to put that money in the bank where it will be safe," said he, at length. "Then are you willing to go back with me to Bridgeport so that I can collect evidence that your story is true?"

"Yes, sir; I will go with you anywhere," said Nat.

This was all that Judge Daniels wanted. He had been doing a heap of thinking while Nat was telling his story, and when he had seen Nat close his valise he got up and walked over to where the police justice sat in his chair. The court was just about ready to begin. He was evidently astonished at what the judge had to

tell him, and when he came back he was full of business.

"I will carry one valise, you can carry the other, and we will go down, get a carriage and take them to the bank," said he. "That will be the first job done. I hope the dog will not bite me?"

Nat hastened to assure him that the dog would not, and together they left the court room and in a few moments more were seated in a hack, with Benny for company, and were being whirled away toward the bank in the lower end of the city. At every turn Nat found something to wonder at. The streets were crowded with all sorts of vehicles and Nat more than once held his breath for fear that their driver would run into some of them.

Pedestrians crossed and recrossed before them until Nat was certain that somebody would be run down; but he did not have time to take it all in. Judge Daniels had a good many questions to ask, and while Nat was trying to make

everything clear to him, they drew up in front of the bank.

Judge Daniels was so well known there that he was invited at once into the private office where there was no one to see them but the president. At his request Nat related his story once more, the judge watching it closely to detect any flaws in it, and when the money was poured out on the table before the president, the latter could scarcely restrain his astonishment. Several clerks were summoned to count the money, and Nat strange as it may seem, did not bother his head whether they counted it right or not. The money was out of his hands, it had been surrendered to those whose duty it was to look after it, and he was satisfied. Finally one of the clerks presented a paper to the president, who looked at it and said:

"Do you know how much money you have here, Bub?"

Nat replied that he did not. He took the money as he found it without stopping to count it.

"I don't think you could have counted all this money in a hurry," said the president, with a smile. "You have here $40,000 lacking $10. Now what are you going to do with it?"

Nat was obliged to confess that he did not know. Judge Daniels and the president exchanged a few words in a lower tone, and then the latter arose and picked up his hat.

"We'll let it lay here until we go up to that place of yours," said he. "Now, Nat, you want some good clothes. Look at your shoes. They are all giving out."

How different this was from what Jonas said to him the last time he referred to Nat's shoes! He readily surrendered himself to Judge Daniels' guidance, and in half an hour more came out of the tailor shop with a wonderful change in his appearance. The clothes he had taken off would do very well for the country but they would hardly do for the city. It was not possible that anybody who had known him in Manchester could have recognized him. Then after he had been to a barber shop and had his

hair neatly trimmed, the transformation was complete.

The next thing was to go to Judge Daniels' home and get dinner; and here Nat's admiration and surprise knew no bounds. It did not seem that those chairs were made to sit on, or that the carpet was made to walk on; or that the lady who came to see him, would not take wings and fly up out of his sight. It was the judge's wife. She seated herself beside him on the sofa, listening in unbounded astonishment to Nat's story, the Judge watching it all the time to see if there were any flaws in it, and when it was over she reached down and patted the dog, and Benny never raised any objections to it.

During the afternoon they went down to the Judge's office where there was another consultation held between him and his partner. The latter was amazed, but he thought that the best thing the Judge could do would be to accompany Nat to his home and get all the evidence there was to be had; so the next morning, Benny being left with the hostler, they took the cars

for Bridgeport. This was the first time that Nat had been on a railroad train, and sometimes, when he looked out at the window and saw how fast they were going, he could not help clutching the seat for fear that the train was going to leave the track. Arriving at Bridgeport they went to a hotel for the rest of the night, and the next morning they hired a carriage to take them to Pond Post Office. We can scarcely imagine what Nat's feelings were when he gazed upon the scenes which were so familiar to him; and when at last he got out of the carriage and opened the bars so that it could be driven through to where Jonas was standing in the door waiting for them, he felt like yelling. On the contrary he controlled himself and said quietly:

"How do you do, Mr. Keeler?"

"Well, I will be dog-gone!" was all Jonas had to say in reply.

Getting the evidence he was in search of was not difficult. Jonas saw in a moment "which side of his bread had the butter onto it," and answered all his questions readily; while the an-

tics which Caleb went through were enough to make Nat fairly burst with merriment. They were all sincere, too. He said "dog-gone the luck" several times in a whisper, felt of Nat's clothing with his fingers, and could not bring himself to believe that the thing was true. But it was to Mrs. Keeler that Nat devoted the most of his attention. The woman seemed really glad of his good luck, and Nat assured her that at some future time there was a thousand dollars awaiting for her out of Mr. Nickerson's money.

It was a happy moment for Nat when they seated themselves in the carriage bound for Bridgeport, and Judge Daniels declared that, as far as he could see, Nat's story was all true, and that the money which he had struggled so hard to obtain was all his. All that remained to do now was to have a guardian appointed and get ready to go to school.

"It will not take me five minutes to select a guardian," said Nat. "Will you take it, Judge Daniels?"

The judge said he would and so the matter was settled.

Years have passed away since the events that are recorded in this story took place, and if you go to a certain law firm and ask to see Nathaniel Wood, you would be fairly surprised to see in that tall, well-dressed man who is coming toward you the ragged, dirty-faced boy who was wont to do the chores about Jonas Keeler's place. Jonas thinks the world of him, although to tell the truth, he does not do any work to speak of as long as his remittance from St. Louis lasts.

"Do you know Nat Wood, that little snipe who used to work on my farm?" he would say to some listener. "Well, he has got to be a big lawyer in the city. If he ever runs for President, I am going to vote for him."

Benny is dead; he served his day and generation faithfully. He soon grew to be a regular favorite around the Judge's house, and although a tramp would have passed by on the other side,

people who came there on business were readily admitted, and no questions asked. Nat is the same fellow he always was. He was an honest boy and he grew up to be an honest man. He is always ready to live over old times; but those he likes best to talk about are those that attended his Struggle for a Fortune.

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